

Thirty-First Sunday, October 30, 2011

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First Reading: Malachi 1:14-2:2, 8-10

The prophet Malachi addresses a miserable situation where the priests have failed to perform regular sacrifices and offer solid teaching. God threatened to turn into curses the blessings they pronounced. The people were not only estranged from God but were divided. They had forgotten that they were the creation of a common father.

Psalm 130 was sung by pilgrims on arrival at the temple. Actually, these were the sentiments Malachi demanded from the corrupt priests of his time.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

In First Thessalonians, Paul writes about himself and his work. Some would not have distinguished him from other wandering teachers common in that Greek world, many of whom were only interested in themselves and financial advantage. Paul clarifies the nature of his work and its motivation. He cared for his converts like a mother; they were his brothers and sisters. He took no money from them. He worked day and night exercising his trade as a tent-maker.

Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus concludes his activity in the temple with a long denunciation of the scribes and the Pharisees. The disciples of Jesus were to practice a "higher righteousness" than that of the Pharisees. What was said was to be endorsed by what was done.

The Pharisees are criticised on three grounds: they had distorted the law from being a delight, an easy guide and light for the people into a yoke or burden; they wore their phylacteries and tassels to win admiration rather than provide edification; and they loved titles which obscured the one Fatherhood of God and the one brotherhood and sisterhood of God's family.

Homily Notes

The words of Matthew 23:8-10 *not to call anybody on earth Master, or Father or Teacher*, are not meant to be taken literally but are intended to draw our attention to an important reality. Today's Gospel emphasises the Fatherhood of God and its consequences for the way the disciples of Jesus relate to one another: as brothers and sisters, bound together by Christ, teacher and master. He is the one who leads them to receive life from God, whom he calls Abba, because of his great familiarity with God. Jesus' place in bringing us closer to his father is unique. No one else can take his place.

However, using important religious titles is in no way wrong. But when we begin to insist on them and all that distinguishes us from each other, it may make us believe ourselves to be important and, little by little, we may even take the place of God. Whatever the titles, (priest, brother, sister, chairperson, treasurer), they must never obscure the place of God our father who alone gives life to his children. This Gospel text reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters and that only God is our father.

Our theme for Mission Month, *Together in Faith*, calls us to grow more fully into an intimate relationship with God and learn to relate to one other as brothers and sisters. No wonder the prophet Malachi denounces priests for not promoting genuine brotherhood among the people. For this reason, the Psalmist urges us to cultivate the virtue of humility and repentance, so as to enhance this brotherhood.

Our faith urges us to live in communion with others. As such, it is not independent of others. It is meant to serve our brothers and sisters; to lighten their burdens. We need to emulate St Paul who shared what he had by not bothering the early converts, but should others approach us for help, our faith should urge us to respond positively to their needs.

We are also called together in faith to be genuine and sincere. Jesus says “anyone who exalts himself will be humbled and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted”. We are all called to live our faith authentically. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do not say anything. What you are stands over you all the while and thunders so loudly that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.”

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