



Sunday Mass Preparation Guide

Including

The Readings

**First Reading
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Gospel**

Study Guide

**Study Guide including Background on Readings
And Thought Questions**

In-Depth Reflection

**A Thought-Provoking Written Analysis on
One of the Readings**

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB » Bible » Daily Readings

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 151

Reading 1

MAL 1:14B-2:2B, 8-10

A great King am I, says the LORD of hosts,
and my name will be feared among the nations.
And now, O priests, this commandment is for you:
If you do not listen,
if you do not lay it to heart,
to give glory to my name, says the LORD of hosts,
I will send a curse upon you
and of your blessing I will make a curse.
You have turned aside from the way,
and have caused many to falter by your instruction;
you have made void the covenant of Levi,
says the LORD of hosts.
I, therefore, have made you contemptible
and base before all the people,
since you do not keep my ways,
but show partiality in your decisions.
Have we not all the one father?
Has not the one God created us?
Why then do we break faith with one another,
violating the covenant of our fathers?

Responsorial Psalm

PS 131:1, 2, 3

R. In you, Lord, I have found my peace.
O LORD, my heart is not proud,
nor are my eyes haughty;
I busy not myself with great things,
nor with things too sublime for me.
R. In you, Lord, I have found my peace.
Nay rather, I have stilled and quieted
my soul like a weaned child.

Like a weaned child on its mother's lap,
so is my soul within me.

R. In you, Lord, I have found my peace.

O Israel, hope in the LORD,
both now and forever.

R. In you, Lord, I have found my peace.

Reading 2

1 THES 2:7B-9, 13

Brothers and sisters:

We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children.
With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you
not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well,
so dearly beloved had you become to us.
You recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery.
Working night and day in order not to burden any of you,
we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly,
that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us,
you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God,
which is now at work in you who believe.

Alleluia

MT 23:9B, 10B

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

You have but one Father in heaven
and one master, the Christ.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

MT 23:1-12

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying,
"The scribes and the Pharisees
have taken their seat on the chair of Moses.
Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you,
but do not follow their example.
For they preach but they do not practice.
They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry
and lay them on people's shoulders,
but they will not lift a finger to move them.
All their works are performed to be seen.
They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels.
They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues,
greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.'
As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.'
You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers.

Call no one on earth your father;
you have but one Father in heaven.
Do not be called 'Master';
you have but one master, the Christ.
The greatest among you must be your servant.
Whoever exalts himself will be humbled;
but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

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THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 5, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for gathering us together to share life and your Word. Breathe your Spirit upon us so that we can be led by you as we break open your Word.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings have some tough words for the religious leaders who lived in the time of Malachi and Jesus. In the second reading, Paul shows himself to be a good and effective leader by serving with love those whom he was sent to preach the Word to.

If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

FIRST READING: Malachi 1:14, 2:2, 8-10

Roughly a century after the Babylonian exile and prior to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, the priests play a central role in the life of Israel. In this reading, the leaders are castigated for failing to follow the ways of God and for leading others astray. For this, they will be cursed by God. They, like the Pharisees, have been poor and false teachers of their people.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 131

This beautiful psalm calls for trust and confidence in God and for a spirit of humility—attitudes in sharp contrast with the pride and haughtiness present in the leaders mentioned in the first and third readings.

SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

In contrast to the priests in Malachi's time and the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' time, Paul proves himself to be an authentic teacher who nurses his flock into God's ways. The passage is full of warmth and affection for the Thessalonians. While Paul is with them, he is like a "nursing mother." Not only does he preach and teach, but he shares with them his very self. Because he does not want to be a burden to his new converts, he works for his own living. Finally, Paul reminds us that the Gospel he preaches is no mere human work but the power of God in our midst.

GOSPEL: Matthew 23:1-2

The Gospel is a strong condemnation of the Pharisees and Scribes. This whole chapter must be

read in the context of the historical situation that Matthew is dealing with. Around 85AD, Christians are being expelled from the synagogues, which resulted in a lot of antagonism between Jews who became Christians (people like Matthew himself) and Jews who did not convert to Christianity. While Jesus, most likely, did say some harsh things to the Pharisees and Scribes (just like the prophets of old condemned the leaders of their time (e.g. first reading), it seems that Matthew exaggerates Jesus' words. For one thing, not all Pharisees and Scribes are bad. The language of chapter 23 is that of a prophet who chastises a stubborn people.

Also, when reading Matthew 23, we need to remember that Matthew's primary concern or focus is *not* the Pharisees and Scribes but the leaders of his *own* community, some of whom may have been throwing their weight around and beginning to manifest the bad traits of the Pharisees and the Scribes who lived in Jesus' time. Some of the leaders may have been more concerned about their own self-importance than about the Gospel. The warning for the *leaders* in the Christian Church is that they should not follow the bad example of the Pharisees and Scribes. If God did not spare them or their temple, surely he will not spare an unfaithful church. In today's section of chapter 23, Jesus specifically levels *three criticisms* at the Scribes and Pharisees. They do not practice what they preach. They are too legalistic in their interpretation of the Scriptures. They are full of their own self-importance, seeking the front seats and titles. This Gospel challenges today's shepherds *and* all disciples to look into their own hearts and see to what extent the spirit of the Pharisee lies within.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image in the readings spoke to you most? Why?
2. Paul showed great affection for his communities and yet he often chastised them for their failings. As parents, teachers, leaders, managers, etc., what suggestions do you have for balancing these two roles?
3. Are there forms of Phariseeism present in today's Church? If so, how do they manifest themselves? How might a spirit of Phariseeism manifest itself in us?
4. What qualities in leaders turn you off the most? What qualities attract you the most?
5. To whom is it easy for you to offer service? To whom might you offer it to begrudgingly?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday's readings. Suggestion: Pray for leaders, including yourself, that all may have a deep desire to follow the humble servant leadership style of Jesus.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for government and church leaders. Pray also for teachers and coaches of the young. ©

Save the Date!!

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!

PASTORAL LEADERS ARE ESPECIALLY CALLED TO LIVE THE MESSAGE

Reflection for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Today's first reading and gospel are tough ones on leaders, especially church leaders. It is a Sunday, this leader would love to be somewhere else and a Sunday when this writer is tempted to write about *anything else* but the readings placed before us today.

Every priest is especially aware of the recent sex abuse scandals amongst his colleagues and worst still, the way bishops even Cardinals dealt with the issue. Reading this past week about the extent of the cover up in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was a horrible experience for me. It is so hard to believe that such behavior happened *very recently* in our church. Reading about the Philadelphia cover up led me to pray several decades of the rosary in reparation for this sins of the clergy against children. It seems to me we should be doing a lot of reparation for years to come. Of course, I also prayed prayers in reparation for my own sins. There is perennial danger that we become so busy pointing out the sins of others that we forget about our own sins.

Commenting on this Sunday's reading, Patricia Sanchez writes:

Unlike any other method of teaching or means of communication, those who minister in the cause of Christ and the gospel are, in their very being, their lifestyle, their manner and mien, as much a part of their message as anything they preach or teach. A teacher of mathematics may be moral or not in his/her personal life' nevertheless, the math the he/she teaches is impervious to his moral state and his/her students will probably learn if they are attentive and willing to apply themselves to their lessons. So it is with science, literature, history, language, etc. All of these and so many other subjects can be taught and/or discussed with little dependence upon or influence from the teacher's personal moral strengths or weaknesses. Of course, good moral character is a valuable and desirable asset in these and all other fields of study but a lack thereof will not change one mathematical theorem, one fact of history, one scientific principle or one part of speech. Although it is certainly not ideal, it is entirely possible for a person to be unfaithful to his/her spouse, or less than thoroughly honest in business, one can be guilty of gossip or greed, one can lie, cheat and/or steal and still manage to teach another the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. When it comes to teaching and preaching and communicating the Word of God, however, the minister of that word must be so thoroughly given over to its service that he/she has consented to become a part of the message. Service of the Word demands a daily and thoroughgoing conversion such that the truth, justice, goodness, mercy and love of the Word of God permeate every aspect of the minister's being. All he says, all she does, all he thinks, all she chooses-all is consonant with and directed by that Word. If a discrepancy exists, i.e., if a minister preaches or teaches one message and lives another, then a disservice is perpetrated against the gospel, as well as God's people, and the minister is a fraud. Perhaps the American Unitarian minister and author Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882 C.E.) put it best in his often quoted and frequently misattributed statement: "Who you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying." Actually, Emerson's complete statement, as included in his 1867 Letter and Social Aims, reads as follows: "Don't (just) say things. What you are stands over you all the while and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary."

That Jesus knew the importance of authenticity in life and in ministry and that he expected such authenticity from his disciples is evidenced in today's gospel. Therein he recommended that they not follow the example of some Pharisees whose actions thunderously belied their words. Rather than allow what they were privileged to teach to transform their lives, some of Moses' successors betrayed that privilege by ostentatious displays of self-righteousness and hypocritical behavior. Rather than allow themselves to be thoroughly converted and radically changed from the deepest depths of their minds and hearts, some of Jesus' contemporaries exhibited "changes" that were merely external and/or cosmetic. They wore their piety (symbolized by their phylacteries and enlarged tassels) like superficial veneer-much like the face that Eleanor Rigby, of Beatles fame, kept in a jar by her door, a mask to wear in public, for appearances only, to gain the admiration and acclaim of others.

In sharp contrast to those who would work for the fleeting glory of human acclaim, Jesus demanded humility, honesty and authenticity of his own, He challenged them (and us) to a truthfulness of mind and heart that is carefully and accurately reflected in word and deed. He bid them (and us) remember that, as ministers of the good news, they (we)

would be preaching and teaching, not only with their words but also with their lives.

Unfortunately, these special qualities are sometimes lacking in those who profess to be in God's service. Keenly aware of this fact, the prophets, including Malachi (first reading) continued to remind God's people that such failures are tantamount to a breach of faith in God as well as a breach of faith with each other (Malachi 2:10). Paul, for his part, in an effort to encourage his Thessalonian converts (second reading) to keep their faith with one another and in God intact and honest, gently recalled the example he had set while he lived and ministered among them. By his own admission, he had shared with them not only the good news but his very life, a life that, in itself, preached loudly and clearly of the good news of salvation.

Leaders or Bosses

In another reflection on today's readings, Patricia Sanchez writes:

H. Gordon Selfridge built and managed one of the world's largest department stores in London. Selfridge claimed that he had achieved success and the loyal acclaim of his employees by being a leader rather than a boss. In his own comparison of these two types of executives, Selfridge explained: The boss drives other people; the leader coaches them. The boss depends on authority; the leader on good will. The boss inspires fear; the leader inspires enthusiasm. The boss says, "I"; the leader, "We". The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown; the leader fixes the breakdown. The boss know how it is done; the leader shows how. The boss says, "Go!"; the leader says, "Shall we proceed?"

*In addition to inspiring and enabling others, good leaders also lead and educate others by the example they set. Both Malachi and Matthew criticized those leaders in their respective communities who lives were not consonant with their words. Leadership disintegrates into "play-acting" (the root meaning of the Greek word for "hypocrisy") when what comes out of a person's mouth is not continually matched and reflected in his/her life-style, values, decisions, choices, etc. To borrow a phrase from Marshall McLuhan's revolutionary book, *Understanding Media*, "The medium is the message." True leaders are first and foremost, in their very selves, the media through which others will come to know and to accept or reject their ideas and authority.*

*This is particularly true of leaders in the context of a faith community; as British author and rabbi Lionel Blue once put it, "You catch religion, like you catch measles, from people-as much from what they are as from what they say" (Claudia Sitzer, *The Quotable Sour*, A Stonesong Press Book, John Wiley and Sons, Inc. New York).*

Jesus did not simply mesmerize the masses with great speeches and fine words; he earned attention, even the attention of his opponents, by his integrity. His leadership was not that of a commando or guerrilla warrior but that of a shepherd, elder, brother and friend. People were inclined to follow him because he did not hang back while his followers forged ahead of him bearing the brunt of the fray; he struck the path and led the way, willingly taking upon himself conflict, rejection and suffering in order to spare his followers. His leadership was such that people "Caught religion," i.e., they believed and continue to believe because of who he is and what he continues to say to the world.

Stewardship Thought

If the **First Foundational Principle** of stewardship is that God owns it all, my life, money, time, talents, family etc the **Second Foundational Principle** is that we are *managers or stewards* of all that he has placed in our care. And someday each of us will have to give an accounting of our stewardship of God's blessings. How well are we nurturing, developing and using his blessings to bless and enrich the lives of others? That is a pretty serious question.