

31st Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Malachi 1:14 – 2:2.8-10

I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is feared throughout the nations. And now, priests, this warning is for you. If you do not listen, if you do not find it in your heart to glorify my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send the curse on you and curse your very blessing. You have strayed from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your teaching. You have destroyed the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. And so I in my turn have made you contemptible and vile in the eyes of the whole people in repayment for the way you have not kept to my paths but have shown partiality in your administration. Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why, then, do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9.13

Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you, and had come to love you so much, that we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well. Let me remind you, brothers and sisters, how hard we used to work, slaving night and day so as not to be a burden on any one of you while we were proclaiming God's Good News to you. Another reason why we constantly thank God for you is that as soon as you heard the message that we brought you as God's message, you accepted it for what it really is, God's message and not some human thinking; and it is still a living power among you who believe it.

Gospel Matthew 23:1-12

Then addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted."

Meditation

In the fifth century B.C., the prophet Malachi took to task the priests of his day who, breaking faith with the law of God, caused the fall of their people. Jesus, too, puts his disciples on guard against the scribes and Pharisees. Forceful in telling others what to do, these teachers do none of it themselves. In their eagerness to be revered, they seek to dominate rather than to serve.

They demand to be called "master" and to be treated with deference. Jesus' disciples must avoid such divisive behaviour. Have they not all only one Master, the Christ, and one Father, God?

Are they not all sisters and brothers, radically equal? No one is to seek to dominate the others. Everyone must be at the service of all. Those in the community who exercise authority have a particular responsibility to lead by serving. One could write a whole book on vanity in the Church. The demand for honorific titles and preferential treatment has not been dispelled, despite Jesus' clear message. This gospel, however, goes beyond questions of vanity. As children of the same Father and disciples of the one Lord, none of us should consider ourselves superior. All of us must give way before the One. Even today, elitism remains a perpetual danger. Paul understood this human weakness. In his letter to the Thessalonians, he gives his own selfless service as the example for leadership in the Church.