

Thirty-first Sunday of the Year A

Matthew 23:1-12

1 Addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, 2 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. 3 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. 4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! 5 Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, 6 like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, 7 being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi.

8 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. 9 You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you must be your servant. 12 Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Other readings: Malachi 1:14 - 2:2, 8-10 Psalm 130 (131) 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13

This chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew is notable for the strong verbal attacks of Jesus on the scribes and Pharisees. To our shame the words of Jesus in this chapter have been used in the past to encourage hatred of the Jews. In modern times the Church has made it abundantly clear that Christians should treasure their relationship with the Jewish people, who have rightly been called 'our elder brothers and sisters in faith'.

In every age, and probably in every religion, religious leadership has gone astray and failed to live up to high ideals. Today's words from the prophet Malachi accuse the priests of straying from the true path and causing many to stumble.

We need religious leaders to guide and direct us, but, as in the days of Jesus, religious leaders can be seduced by status. They can covet places of honour and elaborate vestments. Christians leaders can lose sight of the example of Christ.

Jesus' example is one of humble service. He is the true rabbi, teacher and master. All of us are called to follow in humility the one who came to serve and to make our journey with him towards the fulness of God's life.

Do I take inappropriate pride in the trappings of my Christian life?

Am I ready to humble myself, and is my spirit truly dedicated to Christ?

We pray for religious leaders that they may behave with sincerity and integrity at all times.

We pray for those who are led astray by status and pomposity.