

GOSPEL

Matthew 23:1-12

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.’

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

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Today’s Gospel passage (cf. Mt 23:1-12) is set in the final days of Jesus’ life, in Jerusalem; days filled with expectations and also tension. On the one hand, Jesus directs harsh criticism at the scribes and Pharisees, and on the other, he entrusts important mandates to Christians of all times, thus also to us.

He says to the crowd: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you”. Meaning that they have the authority to teach what is in conformity with the Law of God. However, immediately after, Jesus adds: “but do not do ‘what they do; for they preach, but do not practice”

(vv. 2-3). Brothers and sisters, a frequent flaw of those in authority, whether civil or ecclesiastic authority, is that of demanding of others things — even righteous things — that they do not, however, put into practise in the first person. They live a double life. Jesus says: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger (v. 4). This attitude sets a bad example of authority, which should instead derive its primary strength precisely from setting a good example. Authority arises from a good example, so as to help others to practise what is right and proper, sustaining them in the trials that they meet on the right path. Authority is a help, but if it is wrongly exercised, it becomes oppressive; it does not allow people to grow, and creates a climate of distrust and hostility, and also leads to corruption.

Jesus openly denounces some of the negative conduct of the scribes and of some Pharisees: “they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places” (vv. 6-7). This is a temptation that corresponds to human pride and that is not always easy to overcome. It is the attitude of living only for appearances.

Then Jesus entrusts the mandates to his disciples: “you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. [...] Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (vv. 8-11).

We disciples of Jesus must not seek titles of honour, of authority or supremacy. I tell you, it pains me personally to see people who, psychologically, live in pursuit of vain accolades. We disciples of Jesus must not do this, because among ourselves there must be a simple and fraternal attitude. We are all brothers and sisters and in no way must we abuse others or look down on them. No. We are all brothers and sisters. If we have received talents from the heavenly Father, we must place them at the service of our brothers and

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sisters, and not exploit them for our own satisfaction and personal interests. We must not consider ourselves superior to others; modesty is essential for an existence that seeks to conform to the teaching of Jesus, who is meek and humble of heart and came not to be served but to serve.

May the Virgin Mary, “humble and exalted more than any creature” (Dante, *Paradiso*, xxxiii:2), help us, with her motherly intercession, to spurn pride and vanity, and to be meek and docile to the love that comes from God, for the service of our brothers and sisters and for their joy, which will also be our own.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis tells us that authority, rightly exercised, can help us practice what is right and proper. Who are some examples of people that you know that exercise authority well. What is it that sets them apart from others?



Heart: Why do people often “live in pursuit of vain accolades”, looking for the approval of others through power, position or wealth?



Hands: What can we do to combat pride in our daily lives?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be.’