

## Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – November 5, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

### **Scripture Reading: Malachi 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?

### **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.**

### **Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 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.

### **Gospel: Matthew 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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### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

Jesus devises a puzzle for us this Sunday. And then he makes a remark that contradicts itself. Do I have your attention? First the puzzle. “Call no one on earth your father,” he says. “You have but one Father in heaven” (Gospel). What can this mean? “Father,” or its equivalent, is one of the most widely used names in the world! We say it in many ways to our dad (father, daddy, pa, pop, papa, and in Ireland da, etc.). Also, the normal address for a priest is “Father.” Some believe this name should not be used for a cleric, because of the Gospel passage we are examining. Let’s look at it. “You have but one Father in heaven,” Jesus tells us. This is profoundly accurate. Next to God’s beautiful, tender parental love (Second Reading), you and I are just pale imitations of fathers or mothers or priests. We become competitors with God, I suppose.

But if we are not trying to compete with God for the name Father, we are trying to partake in it, to be vessels from which it is poured. Couldn’t we be called “father” because we humbly accept God’s own fatherhood and motherhood, which he wants to place around our shoulders like a cape? This would mean we are part of the Body of Christ, showing the world what the Father’s love looks like. Why didn’t Jesus say it that way? Many answers exist, some of which you can read on other parts of this week’s website. But maybe he meant, “Let no man usurp the name of God and use it for himself, forgetting all about God’s part in it. Let God be the Father of your children, and let you be the eyes, ears and hands that God works through. This understanding would make Father’s Day and Mother’s day deeply meaningful times. Second, the contradiction.

Jesus proclaims, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. But whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). What kind of sense does this make? If I am lowly, the result would seem to be, quite simply, that I am not exalted. The Gospel reverses this logic and thus presents an enigma. Agreed, but allow me to use a simple metaphor. Suppose you have a water-glass filled to the top with hardened concrete. Are you able to pour water into it? No. It’s the same thing for our souls. When they are hardened as with cement, nothing much else gets in. If we perform our works in order to be exalted, if we crave places of honor, if we are very fond of being hailed “in the marketplace”—none of which are such bad or evil desires but still—as a result, our souls can harden like concrete so there is no room left for the cooling spring-water of God’s presence. Paradoxically, God “exalts” us by entering humbly into our deepest soul. How does such an entrance feel? Look at Sunday’s Responsorial Psalm. It has only three lines total but its gentle tone describes what it is like to be exalted by God. One becomes “like a weaned child on its mother’s lap.” Why not open your bible and take time with such a beautiful psalm. The answer to the puzzle and the contradiction? Riches honor and pride sweep us off God’s lap. Weaned humility lets us be cozy, down where we belong.

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. The priests in this reading neglected their duty and are responsible for the erosion of faith among the people. In general what do you think are some contemporary issues that erode people’s faith? In particular what erodes your faith? What increases your faith?
2. Think of people about whom you can say, “I see God at work in that person.” What is it that you “see” in them? How is the word of God at work in you?
3. As in Luke 22:26-27, Jesus says, “But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves.” Jesus instituted an office of service. “Wide belts,” places of honor and titles helped the scribes and Pharisees increase their social status but did those things help them serve others better? What does help you serve?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen