

## HOMILY for 31<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Readings tell us about the importance of keeping our words & promises. Thinking about that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A pastor's son who had just gotten his driving permit asked his dad if they could discuss the use of the family car. The pastor said to his son, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your Bible regularly, & get your hair cut, & we'll talk about it."

A month later, the boy came back & again asked to discuss the use of the family car. The pastor replied, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You've brought your grades up & you've studied your Bible diligently. But, you never got your hair cut."

"You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that," the young man replied. "Samson had long hair, Moses & Noah probably had long hair. All the pictures of Jesus show Him with long hair..."

"Yes," the pastor interrupted, "and they walked everywhere they went!"

Anyhow, "hypocrites" is one of the terms that our society hates the most. It often associates with people who say one thing & do another. The typical hypocrites that our society usually talks about are our political & religious leaders. These people tend to make lots of big promises, but produce very few actions to follow through with those. Our political leaders are some of the biggest hypocrites that the public usually encounters in its daily life. They say one thing & then do another. They do not keep their words & promises to the public. They feel no shame about their empty promises, nor do they get motivated enough to do more good deeds & try to back up their words with some real work.

However, our political leaders are not the only ones who have problem with hypocrisy. Our religious leaders are another group of people who have often been accused of being hypocrites over the years. For they often tell the public to follow certain Commandments or religious laws, but they do not do it themselves. Instead, they enjoy picking on others on their violation of some of them & attempt to police the public on conforming to those laws. They spend most of their time to come up with more religious laws while not moving a finger to do anything & living up to those themselves. Their hypocrisy made our Lord Jesus really mad; hence He would use every chance to correct them & help them change from that bad habit.

This Sunday's Gospel shares with us one of those occasions that Jesus tried to help the public avoid the Jewish religious leaders' hypocrisy as following, "Jesus spoke to the crowds & to His disciples, saying, 'The scribes & the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do & observe all things, whatever 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 & lay them on people's shoulders; but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen.' It continues, "...They are fond of places of honor at banquets & the front seats in synagogues, of marks of respect in public & of being called 'Rabbi.'...The greatest among you will be the one who serves the rest. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

First of all, Jesus advises His disciples & the public to keep on observing God's Commandments & religious laws. For that is what God would want all of God's people to do. But, He does not want us to follow the Jewish religious leaders' example & be hypocrites like them. He wants us to practice what we preach. He wants us to do more good deeds & talk less.

He urges us to roll up our sleeves to practice His Commandment of love: love God & love our neighbors much more every day & stop passing judgments on others like the Pharisees did. That's how we can avoid being a hypocrite to the world.

Secondly, Jesus calls on us to act humbly & try to lift up people around us, instead of exalting ourselves. If we want to be the greatest, we must learn to serve our brothers & sisters. Clearly this expectation of our Lord is contrary to how our current world thinks & works every day. For most people tend to act proudly & find themselves hesitate to serve their misfortunate neighbors. They want to be the greatest by trampling on others & abandoning God's Commandments. They prefer the lifestyle of the rich & the famous to the one of the poor & the servant. They look for the limelight & five minute of fame by doing horrible things & hurting others without any hesitation. This public tendency seems to drive up more violent acts & mass shootings in our society.

However, our current world is not the only period in human history experiencing such a phenomenon. Evidently the Temple priests in the time of prophet Malachi committed the same sin as they abandoned their covenant with the Lord & lost their personal integrity. This Sunday's First Reading expresses the Lord's disappointment about their lifestyle as following, "...If you do not lay it to the heart, to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, I will send a curse upon you... Yes, I have already cursed it, because you do not lay it to heart. You have turned aside from the way, & have caused many to falter by your instruction. You have made void the covenant of Levi... I therefore have made you contemptible & base before all the people since you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your decisions... Why then do we break faith with each other, violating the Covenant of our fathers?" So, evidently the Lord scolded the Temple priests for staying away from the Covenant of Levi & hence losing their own credibility with Him. Their failure to follow the Covenant of the Lord had misled the people of God & set a bad example to them. Because of that, the Lord had decided to put a curse on them & make them contemptible & feel rejected by all the people around them.

Unlike the Pharisees in this Sunday's Gospel, or the Temple priests in the first Reading, Paul was a wonderful role model for the people of God according to today's Second Reading. Here's how the Second Reading shares with us about his great example to the Thessalonians: "Brothers & 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... You recall our toil & drudgery. Working night & day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." That way of life is exactly what Jesus wants us to follow as Christians. He hopes that we will be like Paul, & not like the Pharisees or the Temple priests.

My dear brothers & sisters, none of us wants to be called a hypocrite, especially living in a world that is not friendly & open to faith & religion like ours right now. That means, we got to observe God's Commandments faithfully & do a lot of humble & kind acts for the world. Most importantly, we need to keep our promises & try to set a good example of Jesus to everyone around us every day.