

31st Sunday – A – 2017
Nov. 5, 2017
Holy Spirit (SH/HT)

Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10
I Thess 2:7b-9, 13
Matt 23:1-12

I. Many of the older adults present here today may have grown up in a very authoritarian world, a world in which the adults in our lives were very stern and strict. Parents – perhaps, particularly in German households! - may have been very demanding and not demonstrating much tolerance, affection or tenderness towards us. We may remember teachers – especially in Catholic Dubuque, our religious sisters – as strict, uncompromising, meting out corporal punishment at will. And we may have known priests who were likewise distant, directive, demanding – not really demonstrating characteristics of the Good Shepherd.

- some of us may dismiss those experiences as just part of the times and the culture...telling ourselves that's the way it was back then...and then we move on with our own lives
- but for others of us, such an authoritarian world left scars. We may have grown into adulthood angry and resentful ourselves. We may have struggled with trying to make sense of it all, with trying to be more compassionate and caring and loving ourselves.

II. There were other authority figures in our lives we remember with fondness:

- the mother or father who, while still being the head and leader in the household, was also tender, loving and compassionate
- the religious sister who was filled with joy and loved all of the children in her class
- the pastor who quietly performed deeds of charity for our family or our neighbors down the street who were struggling

These are the memories of authority figures we want to hang on to – we want to nourish their example of leadership in our own lives, in the roles we play today as leaders in our families, our schools and our parishes. We want to communicate the same love and tenderness to those we teach today.

III. Both the first reading and the gospel lambast those who do not live up to who they are supposed to be as leaders in their community.

- in the first reading the prophet Malachi directs God's word to the priests of the Jewish world who were entrusted with a holy role among the people but who did not take it to heart themselves. They themselves are not faithful to God's word.

- in the gospel Jesus strongly criticizes the scribes and Pharisees. They have an important leadership role in the community. As Jesus says, they take the chair of Moses – and so they are the legitimate teachers in society. Jesus tells his disciples to do what they say, but do not do what they do – because the scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites. Instead of humbly living the word of God themselves, they look for status, recognition and praise. Jesus teaches his disciples they must be as a servant, willing to be humble.

IV. The model of leadership is St. Paul – who gives us the beautiful image of a “nursing mother.” St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians and reflects upon his role among them as a teacher of the gospel message. St. Paul was clearly the leader in many Christian communities...he could be direct and candid, not hesitating to say it as it is...challenging fellow Christians to go to the next level. At the same time his leadership is seasoned with humility and wisdom.

“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. ...we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.”

V. Such a model of Christian leadership should be *ours* as we live out roles as a parent, member of the community, minister and priest.

Parents in a family must be the parent – they cannot abdicate their role to their children or try to be “friends” with their children. Parents are the leaders in their families, but they must be cautious not to become those hypocrites Jesus criticizes in the gospel. Parents cannot tell their children one thing and do another themselves. Instead they must model the compassion of Jesus, the virtues of forgiveness, forbearance and most especially, love.

Singles – each of us as members of the community, are leaders in the ways of the gospel to one another. We cannot be inhospitable to one another – unfriendly – solitary curmudgeons! Sometimes I think children and youth in our community may look at the adults in the community and see us as unfriendly grumps, living in our own narrow world. I hope this isn’t the case! Instead, we must authentically live the gospel message, mindful of how we are attentive to others, charitable and genuinely hospitable. Children and youth need authentic role models of gospel living – they must see in us people who have taken the message of Jesus to heart and genuinely live it.

And those of us in more official roles: priests, deacons, members of our parish committees, liturgical ministers – ushers, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, servers, music leaders, sacristans – anyone who is in a public, leadership role – must be mindful of the visible role we play. Anyone serving in these capacities is really representing the Church to the wider public. When visitors and strangers look at us, they are seeing the face of the Church. We may not think so, but to them, we represent the wider Church community. So we must be careful not to disappoint others, not to turn people away, not to be a contrary sign of the gospel.

VI. Each of us, and all of us together, comprise the culture of our day. How do we, as the Church community today, cultivate an environment in which we demonstrate compassionate, servant leadership? How do we create memories which invite our children and youth to recognize the compelling vision of Jesus Christ?

Fr. Dwayne Thoman