

SUNDAY 31 ORDINARY TIME A.

Our 1st reading, today, comes from the book of Malachi, which is The last book of the Torah, which is the first part of The Jewish Bible.

Actually nothing is known of Malachi himself but the book was composed in his name.

It comes from around the period of the 5th century before Christ. In this book there is much emphasis on sin, judgement & repentance.

In today's sample there is a warning directed at the priests of the temple, who were indifferent to their rituals and their teaching responsibilities. They were often unfair in their judgments

It's a sad judgment of human nature that the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus time were no different. And we don't have to look too far today, to identify some of our Church Leaders for similar examples.

Pope Francis has been very outspoken in his denunciation of clergy with higher ambitions instead of concentrating on their role as servants of the people.

In the 2nd reading from Paul we see a great example of servant leadership in serving his Christian community.

Over the past few weeks Jesus has been concentrating on his condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites because of the way they impose rules and regulations, heavily on the people, but not observing them themselves. Today, Jesus instructs His followers not to fall into the same trap

The setting in this gospel is 3 days after Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem and He is encountering many challenges, initiated by the Scribes and Pharisees, and He responds with this outburst of condemnation.

In the history of the Jews, their principal encounter with God was through Moses and the Law he passed down. After Moses death Joshua inherited this role which was later passed on to the elders and then the Scribes and Pharisees.

Meanwhile the Prophets continued to act as Gods messengers, when needed, to pass on His messages, His promises, His warnings, His displeasure and judgments.

In Jesus time the Scribes and Pharisees were seen as successors to Moses, hence Jesus reference to “The seat of Moses” as their recognised role as leaders in teaching and implementing the law. so, in spite of their personal failings, these Scribes and Pharisees were to be respected for their role as official teachers and interpreters of the Torah. Jesus wanted His disciples to avail themselves of that treasure and to receive from them expert counsel on spiritual matters.

If they were to be disciples of Jesus they should also exhibit reverence for God

Apart from Jesus condemnations of the Scribes and Pharisees, his comments, today, were intended as a warning to future Christian leaders not to fall into the same trap of abuses of authority in their own ministry. They were never to say one thing and do another, but should faithfully follow His teaching and avoid titles and practices which would imply arrogant superiority or hypocrisy, but

rather become a community of mutual love and service, especially the leaders and teachers.

As a prophetic peacemaker, Jesus challenges those who pervert religion into an opportunity to gain, personal honor, glory and power. Jesus accuses the Scribes and Pharisees of seeking the honor and glory that belongs solely to God. The Pharisees liked to dress and act in such a way as to draw attention to themselves instead of glorifying God. In their misguided zeal for religion, they sought respect and honor for themselves rather than for God.

Jesus message is clear, we need to become servant leaders in a serving community. The church is a servant community in which we care for others, the sick, the homeless, the distressed. etc

Also we need to live the faith we profess, as clergy we should exercise our role with care and compassion, serving our people with love and not burdening them unnecessarily.

As a Christian community, its similar, serving with love those suffering in any way. We also need to live the faith we profess caring for the sick, the lonely, the depressed. We need to build a community of love and justice. In our Pillar meeting on Tuesday some of these aspects were identified as areas requiring attention let us ensure that this is done.

In my experience I have found that there is one area where many fall into error, and that is in the use of power.

Instances of child abuse by clergy in most religions but especially ours.

We have seen in the press how a Hollywood Director used his position inappropriately with young women.

When I was in the bank there was a General Manager who used to boast saying that “some rule by consultation but he ruled by fear and confrontation.”

In the armed forces there have been many reports of sexual intimidation of recruits.

In many instances the victims are helpless because if they react nobody listens and their future careers compromised

These are just a few instances, you will be aware of many more

Let us hope that we listen to what Jesus had to say today when he said. “Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted”