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Parochial Vicar, Christ the King Catholic Church
11/5/17

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 151

Reading 1 [Mal 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?**

Responsorial 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.

Reading 2 [1 Thes 2:7b-9, 13](#)

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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.

Alleluia [Mt 23:9b, 10b](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

You have but one Father in heaven
and one master, the Christ.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Mt 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 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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Our Gospel has been used and abused so much in the Christian tradition that, unfortunately, it typically brings us anything but peace.

It has been a source of contention as to why priests go by “Father”;

it has been a weapon to prove who is truly pious and who is really a fraud.

It has been a challenge against hypocrites by hypocrites.

Never mind that St. Paul tells the Ephesians that “Christ gave some as pastors and teachers to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry.” (Eph 4:11-12),

or that he called himself a spiritual father in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Never mind that the Psalmist tells us that what God wants from us is not self-righteousness but “a humble, contrite heart” (see Ps. 51).

In the end, the rabbis, the teachers, the fathers, and the masters we should be avoiding are much closer than the person sitting next to us.

They are the veil of sin that veils all peoples (see Is. 25).

Sin, disguising itself as a spiritual sage, leads us to think that what we do as Christians is no more important or worthwhile than any other religion, saying that spirituality is “whatever fits your own personal feelings or needs.”

Dawning its academic prowess, sin tells us that it is just “personal expression” or “beyond the scope of an artificially constructed morality.” And that to say otherwise is ignorant and dangerous.

Sin woos us into thinking that relationship is about what we get out of others, and not about selflessness and generosity.

And through its trickery, sin becomes our masters.

Truly, it is terrifying how willingly we choose these masters.

And, as if we suffer from a spiritual Stockholm syndrome, we defend them because they have warped our understanding of who we are to the point that we cannot see ourselves without them.

While it may not be our fault that we are sinners

– we were born into a world of sin –

we cannot conflate the notions of fault and responsibility.

Fault is past-tense.

It tell us the cause.

We have no control over the families into which we have been born.

We cannot forecast, at least completely, those situations of temptation or vulnerability.

The fault may or may not be our own with regard to the various addictions, mindsets, or prejudices from which we struggle.

And so focusing on where the fault lies for our sinfulness is pointless.

But saying that sin is not our responsibility is erroneous at best, and narcissistically arrogant in general.

Responsibility is present-tense, telling us what is demanded of us in the here and now.

It does not care what has happened to bring us to this point, nor why we find ourselves in our predicament. It only cares about how we are going to respond to our situation.

In the end, brothers and sisters, our responsibility to act is all our own.

And there are really only two ways to respond. The way of sin and the way of holiness.

The first way is very familiar to us, because we tend to choose it.

Yet our nature, fallen as it is, can still recognize the wolf's teeth underneath the sheep's fleece.

We know that the pleasure, the satisfaction, the fulfillment of sin leaves us as soon as we attain it, abandoning us to search for more pleasure, greater satisfaction, and desperate fulfillment.

The second way, I think, is best described by our Responsorial Psalm today.

It is not in the trickery of sin's invented utopia, but rather in the Creator of our souls that we can find peace (see responsorial Psalm).

This way is harder, because it asks from us a humility we have been duped into thinking is weakness.

It challenges us to still and quiet our souls when all we have ever known is the chaos of our busy lives.

This way of holiness inspires us to hope in our true rabbi; our real teacher, our heavenly father.

He Who is, and was and ever shall be our Master and our Beloved, Who humbled himself so that we might be exalted (see Gospel).

My brothers and sisters, our peace lies here,

May we have the courage to renounce Sin's claim upon us and acclaim with the host of Heaven the glorious name of the Lord of Hosts (see 1st reading):

Christ Jesus.