Tuesday of the Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 23:23-26): Jesus said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

"Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

Fr. Austin NORRIS
(Mumbai, India)

Today we seem to catch Jesus in a foul mood —someone must have really gotten him upset; upset with false religiosity, pompous claims and egoistic piety. He has sensed the lack of love, i.e., "judgment and mercy and fidelity" (Mt 23:23), behind the superficial actions of trying to fulfill the Law. Jesus embodies all these in his person and ministry. He was justice, mercy and faith. His actions, miracles, healings and pronouncements exuded all these true fundamentals which flowed from his loving heart. For Jesus, it was not the matter of the law, but the matter of the heart…

Even in the words of chastisement, we see a hand of love held out by Jesus, to those who would want to come back to the basics: "You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Pope Francis said: "A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient… Let us remember the Prophet Isaiah who says that even if our sins were scarlet, God's love would make them white as snow. This mercy is beautiful!"

"Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean" (Mt 23:26). How true this is for each of us! We know how personal cleanliness makes us feel fresh and vibrant within and without. Even more so in the spiritual and moral realm, our inner self/spirit, if clean and wholesome, will shine forth in good deeds and actions, that "all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (Jn 5:23). Let us look at the bigger picture of love, justice and faith and not settle for the smaller nitty-gritty which consumes our time and makes us small and petty. Let us jump into the vast ocean of God's love and not be satisfied with the rivulets of pettiness.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “He rebukes them also, because having a certain boasting of useless affectation, they abandon the ministry of the most useful things. Therefore, the first thing to be careful of is the brightness of the inner conscience” (Saint Hilary of Poitiers)

- “The good news is that He is willing to cleanse us, the good news is that we are not finished yet, that as good disciples we are on the way” (Francis)

- “Truth as uprightness in human action and speech is called truthfulness, sincerity, or candor. Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2468)

Other comments

“Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.”

Brother Lluís SERRA i Llançana
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Today, Jesus clearly denounces: “Woe to you…! Woe to you…!” (Mt 23:23, 25). His target is the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, who represent the powerful classes because they exert spiritual and moral control over the people. How can they guide people if they are “blind guides”? Their blindness lies in the inconsistency of scrupulously observing small details, which are important, while neglecting fundamental things like justice, love, and faithfulness. They are concerned with their image, which does not correspond to their inner selves, full of “plunder and self-indulgence” (Mt 23:25). Interestingly, Jesus uses terms related to economic matters.

Today’s Gospel is an invitation for the most influential people and groups in Christian communities—that is, their leaders—to examine their consciences. Do we respect fundamental values? Do we value rules more than people? Do we impose on others what we ourselves are incapable of fulfilling? Do we speak from the self-sufficiency of our ideas or from the humility of our hearts? As Helder Câmara said, “I wish I were a humble puddle that would reflect the sky!” Do people see their pastors as men of God who can distinguish between what is secondary and what is essential? Weakness deserves understanding; hypocrisy provokes rejection.

As we listen to today’s Gospel, we may fall into a trap. Jesus tells the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees that they are hypocrites. There were also some who were sincere. We might think that this text can currently refer to bishops and priests. Certainly, as guides of Christian communities, they must be

vigilant so as not to fall into the attitudes that Jesus denounces, but we must remember that every believer—man and woman—may harbor a “blind Pharisee” within. Jesus invites us: “Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean” (Mt 23:26). Spirituality has its roots within the heart.