

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
(Roma, Italy)

Today, Jesus assumes a clear attitude of diatribe: “Woe to you... Woe to you” (Mt

23:23-25). His objectives are the scribes and the Pharisees, who represent the powerful class exerting a spiritual and moral influence over people. How can they ever lead people if they are “blind guides”? Their blindness lies in the incoherency of scrupulously observing the small details, which do have importance, while neglecting the weightier things of the Law, such as justice, love and fidelity. They are concerned over their own image, but it does not correspond to their inside, full of “plunder and self-indulgence” (Mt 23:25). Curiously enough, Jesus uses words here referring to economic aspects.

Today's Gospel represents an invitation for those persons and most outstanding groups of the Christian communities, that is, their guides, to appraise their conscience. Do we respect the fundamental values? Do we value norms more than people? Do we impose upon others what we cannot do, ourselves? Do we speak from the complacency of our own ideas or from our humility of heart? As Dom Helder Camara said: “I would like to be a puddle of water to become the mirror of heaven.” Do people consider their pastors, men of God who can tell the accessory from the fundamental? Feebleness deserves understanding, but hypocrisy provokes contempt.

When listening to today's Gospel we may fall into some sort of snare. Jesus speaks to the scribes and to the Pharisees, who are hypocrites, for there were also those who were not. And we may conclude that this text, today, may be intended for bishops and priests, only. As guides of the Christian communities they must certainly be careful not to tumble upon those attitudes denounced by God, but we must also remember that every believer —man or woman— may harbor inside a “blind Pharisee”. Jesus invites us to: “Cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean” (Mt 23:26). The path to spirituality is through the human heart.