

Homily For Tuesday of the 21st Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - August 27, 2019

Memorial of St. Monica

1 Thess. 2:1-8 "We are entrusted with the Gospel , not to please mortals, but God who tests our hearts."

Psalms 139 "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You discern my thoughts from far away."

Matt 23:23-26 "You tithe mint, dill and cumin, and have neglected justice and mercy and faith."

The Weightier Aspects of the Law

Introduction

Years ago, in Calgary, a priest was giving a mission. He told the story of a conversation with someone who had left the Church. The priest asked him why. His answer was that there are too many hypocrites there, to which he responded: No, that's not true. There aren't too many hypocrites. We have room for more. Why don't you come back?

Matthew

The Gospel passage today is the 2nd of 3 readings where Jesus aims seven woes, or curses, directly at scribes and Pharisees. Seven times he calls them hypocrites. He identifies seven different ways they pretend to be in tune with God, but are really far away. Sometimes, I think: Poor Pharisees. They try so hard to be righteous. They spend every waking minute working at obedience to the law, the Torah, and teaching people how to be holy before God.

Unfortunately, before we get too comfortable with looking over there, at those who really are hypocrites and liars, we have to take a closer look at where it might apply to us. Fortunately, today, we have a wonderful guide in St. Monica, who spent almost every moment of her life seeking the holiness and prayerfulness which would eventually convert her husband and her famous son to the Catholic Christian faith.

In the fourth woe, Jesus accuses the leaders of not being able to distinguish between what is really important - justice, mercy and faith - and what is less important - tithing, giving back to God a portion of what you have.

Pouring of water or wine through a cloth was done to filter out anything ritually unclean. Insects were on that list, but so were camels. They were the largest of the unclean animals. So, in an outrageous way, Jesus accuses them of being concerned with tiny things and ignoring big things. It is as though they filtered out the gnat but gulped down an entire camel. Both are important, but you need to make sure you do the most important things.

The fifth woe criticizes what the hypocrites do with what's in their hearts. The words actually refer to greed and immorality, pretty serious accusations. That hypocrisy is like serving someone from a cup that you've cleaned the outside but left the inside dirty. If you want your priorities to be correct, you should start with the inside, with what is in your heart. Actions will flow from that cleansing.

1 Thessalonians

While Jesus was speaking to Jews about Jewish things, Paul's Thessalonian Church was made up mostly of non Jews, who had turned from their idols and joyfully received the gospel, even though they were being persecuted for it.

Those people were close to Paul's heart. He wants to encourage them. His point is that there was no hypocrisy in the message they brought. He is not boasting. He is assuring them that they can trust the message because the messenger, Paul, didn't lie about anything. The Good News comes directly from God. If it wasn't they would not have persevered in the face of the opposition they received.

Paul uses a very beautiful image of the harmony between actions and the heart. He says, "We were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves ... Like a nurse, or like a nursing mother, we were gentle among you.

It is also the image of Psalm 139: You have searched me and you know me, O Lord. You discern my thoughts from far away. Such knowledge is so high that I

cannot attain it. God cares for us in the deepest and most profound way, even though we ourselves may be hypocrites at times.

St. Monica

St. Monica had that divine love. Like God himself, she was relentless in making faith the most important thing. Because of that, Monica understood what her role was. It wasn't her job to save the world. She knew that Jesus Christ was responsible for that. Her job was to pray and live for the conversion of first one family member and then another. When that was done, she was ready for heaven. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were so focused on the project God gave us that, when it was accomplished, we could say in earnest, Lord take me home? Take me to my eternal home.

We have all kinds of desires and dreams in the world, but our first task may be closer to home than we think. I realize that this may bring pain to many of us who feel deeply the loss of faith of the people close to us. Monica was immersed in a pagan culture, but managed to surround herself with the spirit of love, gentleness, tenderness - the weightier things of the law, we might say. We also are immersed in an increasingly pagan culture. Therefore, Monica's path could also be our path. Perhaps today, rather than be discouraged, we could see a new path that we hadn't considered. What if we were to choose one person, shown to us by the Holy Spirit, to dedicate our spiritual attention to.

Call To Action

At every mass when we say the act of contrition, we are asking God to make our hearts consistent with our lives. We say: "I confess that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do." When we say, in what I have failed to do, we bring the Pharisee problem to our attention.

Today, our solution is to ask St. Monica to pray for the conversion of our hearts so that we may be ready to offer our very selves in prayer for the conversion of someone who is close to us.