

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 24, 2020

2 Thess 2:1-3,14-17 "Let no one deceive you. Hold fast to traditions through word of mouth or letter."

Psalm 96:10-13 "He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth."

Matt 23:23-26 "Woe to you hypocrites and blind guides who have neglected justice, mercy and faith. "

Purity of Heart

Introduction

I was a carpenter for almost ten years, earning my family's living with my hands, using the tools of the trade. At one time, I was apprenticing under a carpenter from England. The words he used to teach me often included expressions reflecting English life and experience. Doing good quality work was important to him, but when I was being too finicky with some little detail, he would stop me and say: It's not the queen's palace, is it? In other words, the best efforts should be spent on the things that mattered most.

Matthew

In this first of today's two condemnations of the behaviour of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus curses them. Woe to you is a curse, not like a magic spell but a condemnation for mixing up things that are less important with things that are much more important.

The scribes and Pharisees are very careful to offer exactly a tenth of their annual harvest to the Lord, even the tiniest herbs used for seasoning food. There is nothing wrong with this offering *unless* it takes the place of the 'queen's palace' of requirements of the law: justice, mercy and fidelity, which is faithfulness of the heart. They trivialize these highest of qualities. They make a mockery of God himself, who is the source of those qualities, by their wrong priorities.

In the second curse, Jesus criticizes their focus on outward purity while failing to maintain inward purity. Exactly a week ago, we heard Jesus using the image of a camel being squished through the eye of a needle. Now his image is of a camel

being swallowed. Poor camels. It's not their fault that they were considered the largest of the ritually unclean animals, and **not** to be eaten.

Insects were also ritually unclean, so wine or water would sometimes be passed through a filter cloth so as not to accidentally eat one. Jesus challenges their focus on filtering out the tiniest of insects but swallowing the largest of unclean animals. That's how big is their hypocrisy. They take care of tiny details of the law but blatantly disregard the whole reason for the law, which is to reflect God 's qualities of justice and mercy and peace.

The scribes and Pharisees are careful to maintain the ritual purity of the body even while their hearts are contaminated with desires for plunder and self indulgence. They are like dishes that are cleansed on the outside but are left dirty on the inside.

It is fun to laugh at the images Jesus uses to critique the Pharisees. However, it is an essential component of our Christian faith that everything Jesus says in the gospels is intended for us. In this case it is for the qualities of the Pharisees in our own hearts.

2 Thessalonians

St. Paul also deals with a wrong focus in the people of the church at Thessalonica. Paul had explained to them about the return of Jesus in glory. There was a great deal of anxiety there because they had become convinced that the Day of the Lord had already arrived, yet they were still suffering under persecution.

But Paul says: Don't be upset or deceived. You are Christians. We want the Lord to come. If we possess the grace of being in Christ, we will not be shaken, even if the rest of the world loses its peace. There will be a tribulation. Scripture tells us this, but we can be calm in the storm. Stand firm, which is the opposite of being shaken. Hold fast to the Apostolic tradition, orally or in writing. That is how our Catholic faith works. Be encouraged and let the truth of the Good News live in your hearts.

All of us have some anxiety about the end of our earthly lives and the suffering and trials of this life but only those who stand fast and are not shaken by these things will rejoice at the coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead.

Call To Action

The damning thing for the Pharisees is that they should know better. More is expected of them as leaders. This is true for our leaders also. However, by our baptism, that expectation is now placed on all of us.

Fortunately, we have wonderful saintly models offered to us. I love the description of St. Louis of France that, as king, he was also a man of justice, mercy, peace and piety, contrary to the religious leaders in Israel, who opposed the king of justice and mercy, the Prince of Peace himself.

Both Jesus and Paul urge their audiences to reject false worship and let God's truth live in their hearts. Those who focus on the wrong things will be terrified at his coming. Centuries before Christ, the psalmist is anticipating this coming of Christ. His judgment will be one of righteousness, holiness and truth. That truth we know to be Jesus himself, the way, the truth and the life. Let us examine our priorities. Let us stand firm and not be shaken.

Key Passages

2 Thess 2: *We beg you not to be shaken or alarmed as though the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you. God called you through our proclamation of the good news ... Hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father ... comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good word and word.*

Psalm 96: *He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.*

Matthew 23: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected justice mercy and faith ... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you ... for you clean the outside of the cup, but inside it is full of greed and self indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.*