

## **Homily For Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent - Year I**

### **St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Tuesday, March 7, 2023**

**Isaiah 1:10~31** "Seek justice. Remove the evil of your doings. Learn to do good. Seek justice."

**Psalm 50:8~23** "You thought I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you."

**Matthew 23:1-12** "You have one teacher ... one Father in heaven... one instructor, the Messiah."

### **From Hypocrisy to Sanctity**

#### **Introduction**

It seems like Lent is the opportunity for the Church to offer us Scriptures which contain the most stinging rebukes, the harshest criticisms. These readings don't only happen in Lent, of course, but there sure seem to be a lot more of them. It is a difficult time for us because we are constantly faced with evaluating our lives for whether we are truly following the path of holiness set out for us by our divine saviour, Jesus Christ. It is also an excellent opportunity to measure the world around us against the Gospel. We need to do that evaluation because we are called to be images of the truth of God wherever that truth is under attack in the culture. And it certainly is under attack.

#### **Psalm**

Today we have this amazing Psalm 50, a warning to avoid hypocrisy and empty ritual before God. The image suggests a courtroom, with God as the Judge. The charge, the accusation, is that God's people have been offering false worship, claiming to be God's people while acting wickedly.

How about these words from the psalm: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips. For you hate discipline and you cast my words behind you." And then there is this great line: "You thought that I was one just like yourself, but now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you." Isn't that great. The sin begins with turning God into an image of ourselves instead of living the truth that we have been made in God's image and must now overcome the tendency to disrespect that image.

In any court of law, there is one goal only. That's to find out the truth. Nothing else matters. If we don't know what is true, we cannot have justice, or our justice will be based on lies. By the way, this is where a culture of moral relativism gets in real trouble. If truth is anything we want it to be, and my truth is different than your truth, it won't be long before no one cares if there really is such a thing as universal truth. You and I must continue to demonstrate to the world that there is one God who is the source of all truth. That is the martyrdom to which we are called. That is why it matters, not just for our personal salvation but for that of the world around us.

One major difference between our courts and the court of God's justice is that, if God makes a charge, it's basically over. God's word is true. God IS truth and there is no other way. That is why we say, with Scripture, that Jesus is the way and the truth. Both of these together lead to life in Christ. Salvation comes from God alone. It was true in the time of the psalmist. It was true in the time of Isaiah. It was true in the time of Jesus and it is true in our time.

### **Matthew**

A priest giving a mission talk at a Calgary parish, told the story of meeting a young man who had left the Catholic Church of his childhood. He asked why, to which the man replied that he did not want to be part of a church where so many claimed to be Christian but did not live like it. There are just too many hypocrites, he concluded. The priest looked at him and replied, "No, there aren't too many hypocrites. We have room for more, so come on back." I guess that's the reality. I have to acknowledge that my behaviour is always going to fall short of what I believe.

Jesus denounces the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They teach the law, but they don't help people carry the burden of the law. Thus Jesus tells the people to do what they say, but not to be like them. They are guilty of making religious leadership more of a show than an act of service.

This passage is actually an encouragement in the face of hypocrisy. People panic if there are hypocrites in the Church. It is true that such a thing is a real scandal. But

the Lenten journey calls all of us to journey together and as individuals to a state of integrity, where there is harmony between what we believe and what we say and what we do. Even that holy pope of recent memory, Benedict XVI said: "I recognize myself for what I am, a fragile creature, made of earth and destined to the earth, but also made in the image of God and destined to Him".

### **Perpetua and Felicity**

St. Perpetua and St. Felicity in North Africa were both catechumens preparing to receive the Church's sacraments: Perpetua was a married noblewoman nursing her first child, and Felicity was a pregnant Christian slave. Perpetua's baptism was hastened after her arrest, and God told her to pray for strength to withstand her coming trials. While in prison she kept a detailed diary of her sufferings and mystical visions, one of the oldest and most treasured of early Christian writings. Her father pleaded with her to deny her faith, even bringing her infant to the prison in order to persuade her. She refused. Felicity also remained steadfast in her faith, giving birth to a daughter while in prison a few days before her execution. Perpetua, Felicity, and their companions were condemned to be torn by wild animals in the arena. Perpetua understood that their contest was not with animals, but with the devil. She walked into the arena and met her fate with a joy and bravery that astonished many onlookers. She made her life and death a testament to the truth.

### **Call To Conversion**

Jesus is their judge and our judge today. He *is* the Father's justice made visible. But he is also the Father's mercy made visible. He will condemn our hypocrisy. But he is always ready to receive our repentant hearts and provide the mercy that God alone can give us, especially in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Through the disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, may we realize the promise of this image from Isaiah: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow." Scarlet and crimson red are the colour of our sins and the colour of blood. Isaiah prophesied without knowing just how true would be that it is

through the blood of Jesus Christ that we would find the fullness of the washing away of sin.

Without our God at the centre of our Lenten journey, we would be quickly overwhelmed with the weight of our sin and of the judgment for it. Let us not hate God's discipline. Let God be God and let us be his people, washed in the blood of Jesus our Saviour.

### **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Give light to my eyes lest my enemy say: I have overcome him.*

**Collect:** *Without you, mortal humanity is sure to fall. May we be directed to all that brings salvation.*

**Isaiah:** *The vision of Isaiah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, you people of Gomorrah! Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your doings. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Rescue the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow. If you are willing and obedient, Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.*

**Psalm:** *What right have you to recite my statutes, or take my covenant on your lips? For you hate discipline and you cast my words behind you. You thought that I was one just like yourself. But now I rebuke you. Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me. To those I will show the salvation of God.*

**Gospel Acclamation:** *Rid yourselves of all your sins and make a new heart and a new spirit.*

**Matthew:** *Jesus said: The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' chair. Therefore, do whatever they teach you but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. They do all their deeds to be seen by others and to have the places of honour and to be greeted with respect. But you have one teacher and you are all students. You have one Father in heaven. You have one instructor, the Messiah. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.*