

In Christ, All Brothers and Sisters

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A group of African missionaries were sent to work in a diocese in Zambia. On arrival they discovered that almost all the missionaries in the diocese were Americans. The American missionaries called the bishop, who was African, by his first name. The newly arrived African missionaries thought that this was inappropriate and decided to change it. They taught the people to call the bishop "My Lord." This was new to the people but they were ready to learn. One day a woman came to see the bishop and the person she met was one of the American priests. She asked him, "Where is *Our* Lord?" to which the priest gleefully replied, "Our Lord is in the tabernacle."

Vatican II brought much change and renewal in the church. But it is interesting that the area of titles and way of addressing church leaders has undergone practically no change whatsoever. A priest is still called "Reverend Father," a bishop "My Lord" or "Your Excellency," a cardinal "Your Eminence," the head of a religious community is still the "superior." One wonders how the church allowed the use of these high-sounding titles to develop among the faithful, given the fact that the church has always read today's gospel which cautions them against the use of titles that reflect a superior-inferior relationship.

Of course, we should not take the words of Jesus too literally. The message of Christ has more to do with attitudes and behavior than with the use of words and terminologies. Take the case of a self-styled prophet who founded a church, asked his followers to address him as "Brother," yet sits on a throne and have his "brothers and sisters" come to him walking on their knees. Or the case of high-level government officials who are called ministers, which literally means servants, yet this does not make them any humbler. The Law of Christ has more to do with attitudes and behavior than with just words.

Attachment to power and social esteem — **love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi** (Matthew 23:6-7) — compromises the Christ-like witness of the serv-

ant of God. But, here comes the good news: it does not nullify the divine authority of the office. The person occupying a teaching office among the people of God may be personally unfaithful, not practicing what they teach. But God is faithful and guarantees that the teaching office itself is not contaminated with error, and so the teaching itself remains sound and valid.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach (vv 2-3).

Should we ever have the misfortune of knowing some Christian leaders who are as hypocritical as the scribes and the Pharisees described in today's gospel, the challenge for us would be to try and make a distinction between what they teach, which may be sound, and how they live, which may not be worthy of emulation. We must not throw away the baby with the bathwater. Abuse of an office does not nullify the validity of the office itself. Those who distance themselves from the church because they heard or saw unbecoming behavior on the part of some church ministers may indeed be throwing away the baby with the bathwater.

The reading ends with a call for evangelical humility on the part of Christian leaders. What is evangelical humility? It is the recognition that those we evangelize or minister to are not below us but are, in fact, equal to us in the eyes of God. With this humility, preaching becomes not talking down to the people but sharing with them our common struggle to understand and live God's word. With evangelical humility the basic pattern of relationship between ministers and the people of God whom they serve becomes not that of father-son or teacher-student but brother-brother, brother-sister or friend-friend.

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ... There is not longer Jew or Greek, there is not longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28)

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Malachi 2:2-10

1 Thessalonians 2:7-13

Matthew 23:1-12

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靈 修 生 活

常 年 期 第 卅 一 主 日

張 春 申 神 父

那時候，耶穌對民眾和祂的門徒說：「經師和法利塞人坐在梅瑟的座位上：他們所吩咐你們的，你們都要遵守；但不要效法他們的行為，因為他們只會說而不做。他們把沉重而難以肩負的擔子捆好，放在別人的肩上，自己連一個指頭也不動。他們所做的一切，都是為引人注目；因此他們把經文的匣子加大了，衣穗加長了；他們喜愛筵席上的首位，會堂中的上座；喜歡別人在街上向他們致敬，稱他們為『老師』。至於你們，卻不要被人稱為『老師』，因為你們的老師只有一位，你們彼此都是弟兄；也不要稱地上的人為父，因為你們父只有一位，就是天父；你們也不要被人稱為導師，因為你們的導師只有一位，就是默西亞。你們中間最大的，該作你們的僕役。自高自大的，必被貶抑；自謙自卑的人，必被高舉。」(瑪廿三 1-12)

福音作者，一般說來把耶穌公開傳教生活分為三個階段：第一階段是在加里納亞宣講天國喜訊；第二階段是由加里納亞去猶大的行程，行程中耶穌注意十二門徒的精神訓練；第三階段是耶穌榮進耶路撒冷京城，此後與那裡的宗教權威有關天國的道理發生一連串的討論，甚至針鋒相對的辯駁，最後導致祂被釘十字架而死。

今天福音的記錄也是關於耶穌在耶路撒冷對當時的經師和法利塞人所有的批評，而且進而要求跟隨自己的團體，竭力避免任何妄自尊大的態度。我們先把耶穌教訓後代教會的話加以註解，因為那些話初聽起來，令人不易立刻了解。比如：「不要稱地上的人為父」，究竟有什麼意義？究竟怎樣實行？

首先，我們必須知道，耶穌的團體，也便是後代的教會，與人間的團體具有極大的差別。這是一個由相信耶穌基督的人組成的。他們並不是為了解決地上的經濟、政治、社會等等問題而集為一體的；他們之所以合而為一，那是因為大家接受了耶穌的天國喜訊，在現世按照天國的要求而生活。這個教會團體所信仰的真理，不是來自普通的老師，而是唯一無二的老師耶穌基督。只有祂傳給人類天國的真理。這個教會團體所有的永遠生命，也不是來自任何受造物，而是唯一無二的在天大父，只有祂賜給人類永遠的生命。最後，這個教會團體所走往的通天國的道路，更不是來自一般的導師，而是唯一無二的默西亞：基督。只有祂指導人類永生的康莊大道。為了要求信徒認清教會團體中真理、生命、道路的唯一無二來源，耶穌特別強調只有一位老師、只有一位天上的父、只有一位導師。的確，今天我們在教會中稱人為老師、稱人為父、稱人為導師，不過我們都深深知道，在信仰生活中，一切老師代表耶穌；一切父代表天上的父；一切導師代表基督。教會中的老師不教自己的，只教耶穌的真理；教會中的父，不給自己的，只給天上大父的生命；教會中的導師不指示自己的，只指示基督的道路。根據這個重要的信仰，再聽耶穌指斥經師和法利塞人的話，反而更能了解耶穌對自己團體中擔任領袖的人，要求一些什麼。

如果耶穌指斥經師和法利塞人「只說不做」，當然祂要求教會領袖「身體力行」；如果耶穌指斥經師和法利塞人「把擔子放在別人的肩上，自己卻不動指頭」，當然祂要求教會領袖「以身作則」；如果耶穌指斥經師和法利塞人「為叫別人看到」，當然祂要求教會領袖「表裏一致，心口合一」。總而言之，教會領袖的確在團體中是最大的；可是耶穌要求他們作為團體的僕役，如同祂自己來不是為受人服事，而是服事人，為大眾做贖價。

最後，雖然今天我們解釋的福音，特別為教會領袖是反省的資料，不過一切教友都從耶穌口中，認清了教會領袖在團體中究竟具有什麼作用，究竟稱他們為老師、父、好導師，又有什麼意義。

摘自「妙音送長風」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 十 一 月 二 日

拉 2:2-10; 得前:2:7-13; 瑪 23:1-2