

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

First Reading Malachi 1:14b—2:2b,8-10

Through the prophet Malachi, God judges the priests of Israel and calls them to be more faithful to the Covenant.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 131:1-3

We find peace in the Lord.

Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9,13

Paul gives thanks to God for the way in which the Thessalonians received the word of God.

Gospel Reading Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today's Gospel continues to elaborate on the **tension between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees**.

Our Lectionary sequence at this point, however, is **not quite a continuous reading of Matthew**.

In between last week's reading from Matthew and this week's, we find Jesus' question to the Pharisees about the Messiah being "David's son." Having concluded a series of dialogues with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, **Jesus now directs his words to the crowds, warning them not to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees**.

The scribes and Pharisees were **teachers of the Mosaic Law**. They were entrusted with its **interpretation** and, thus, were **influential in determining Jewish practice**.

In order to appreciate the conflict that is evident in this passage, we must understand that **Jesus was basing his teachings on the same laws and traditions** available to the Pharisees. Both were interpreting the Law of Moses in order to better adapt it to contemporary Jewish life. The **differences between their teachings**, therefore, are often **highlighted** and amplified by **Matthew**.

This part of Matthew's Gospel reflects aspects of the **conflict between his Christian community and Pharisaic Judaism**. Matthew's Church is thought to have included many Jewish Christians who may not have believed that a break with the synagogue was necessary to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus tells the crowd that it is **correct to do and observe** what the scribes and Pharisees **teach**; it is **their example that is to be avoided**, namely, **their love of being honoured** and exalted. Hence, the Gospel reflects the tension of an active internal debate within the early Church.

Jesus references two aspects of **Jewish spiritual life** prescribed by the Law of Moses. Phylacteries are small boxes which contain Scripture verses that are placed on the left forearm and forehead. Tassels refer to the fringes worn on the corners of a person's garments; the tassels help to remind those who wear them to keep the commandments.

The warning Jesus gives **against seeking places of honour** in the community was directed as much **toward the Christian community as the named Jewish leaders**. Indeed, it is a warning that resonates with us today. **Christian leadership is a call to service for the glory of God; those who would be leaders among us must, like Jesus, be servants of all**.

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Making the Connection (Grades 1, 2, and 3)

Gospel Reading

Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Younger children are often focused on meeting their own needs and wants. They need our support in learning how to put the needs of others before their own.

Materials Needed

- music, chairs
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Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. **Let's play a game.** Play musical chairs with children.

If necessary, explain the rules.

Say: **When I play the music, walk in a circle around the chairs.**

When I turn off the music, quickly get a seat.

After each turn, I will remove one chair.

After a few turns, pretend to get distracted by your phone or a book and forget to turn off the music. Let the children remind you.

Play one more round, and then say:

I got distracted for a while there, didn't I?

I was supposed to be playing the game with you,

but instead I was thinking about something else!

I wasn't a very good leader.

2. **In today's Gospel reading, Jesus teaches us how to be a good leader.**
Listen carefully.

3. Read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 23:1–12.

4. **Jesus teaches us what it means to be a good leader.**
He says that good leaders are humble.
That means they put the needs of others before their own.
They don't do good things just so that people will see them.

5. **Take a few moments to think of something kind or helpful you can do for someone else. It can be something small. Maybe you can try to do it without the other person finding out it was you!**
We can take joy in knowing we made the other person happy.
We can know that we glorify God when we help others.
We don't need any other recognition.

6. **Pray for God's help** in putting others' needs before our own and in doing good deeds because they glorify God.

7. **Close by praying the Glory Be to the Father.**

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Making the Connection (Grades 4, 5, and 6)

Gospel Reading - Matthew 23:1-12

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Older children are beginning to be able to take on positions of responsibility and leadership. As they accept these new roles, we can help them to recognize that Christian leadership is a call to service for the glory of God.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Ask the group to name people they think of as leaders. For each person they name, ask: ***What are some key characteristics of this leader? What are some of this leader's responsibilities?*** (Accept all reasonable responses.)
2. Ask: ***Do any of these leaders inspire you to want to be a leader? Why or why not?*** (Accept all reasonable responses.) ***Are there any other characteristics you would hope for in a leader?*** (Accept all reasonable responses.)
3. Say: ***In today's Gospel, Jesus talks to the crowd about some of their religious leaders. In fact, he is rather critical of these religious leaders. Let's listen to what Jesus says.***
4. Invite one or more volunteers to read aloud today's Gospel, Matthew 23:1-12.
5. Ask: ***What does Jesus tell the crowd about some of their religious leaders? Why?*** (He tells them to follow what they teach, but not to follow their example; Jesus says that they do not practice what they preach.) ***Jesus then tells the crowd what characteristic he looks for in a good leader. What does he say?*** (Jesus says that leaders should be humble; a good leader serves others.)
6. Ask: ***In what ways are the leaders we named earlier like the kind of leader that Jesus described?*** (Accept all reasonable responses.) ***Are there others we might list as leaders in the model of Jesus? Who?*** Prepare such a list discussing what makes each a leader in the model that Jesus teaches.
7. Conclude in prayer together, petitioning God for the wisdom to grow to be people who humbly serve others as Jesus
8. Pray together a Prayer for Vocations or the Act of Love.

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Making the Connection (Grades 7, 8 and 9)

Gospel Reading - *Matthew 23:1-12*

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

Young people at this age are beginning to assume roles of leadership at home, in the classroom, and in extracurricular activities. We can encourage them to exercise leadership fairly and humbly in service to God.

Materials Needed

- None

Preparation for Sunday Scripture Readings

1. Say: ***You've probably heard the words "You know better than that." The older you get, the more people will look to you to be a good example for others. In other words, people will look to you for leadership.*** Ask the group to name areas in which they are called to exercise more leadership. (Possible answers: in school, in extracurricular activities, in sports, at home)
2. Ask: ***What would you say are the qualities of a good leader?*** (Accept all reasonable answers.)
3. Say: ***In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus talks about leadership. Let's hear what he has to say.***
4. Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 23:1–12.
5. Say: ***Jesus tells the crowd to listen to what the scribes and Pharisees say because they are the teachers of the Mosaic Law. But then Jesus offers a warning about their leadership.*** Ask a volunteer to read aloud the last sentence of verse 3: "For they preach but they do not practice." Say: ***We are familiar with this saying, but we may not have known that it originated in the Bible. How do we phrase Jesus' teaching today?*** (Practice what you preach.)
6. Say: ***Jesus explains to the crowds that the Jewish leaders are so wrapped up in the privilege and honor that come with their position that they neglect to exercise true leadership.*** Ask: ***What does Jesus say are the traits of a good leader?*** (good example, service, humility) Continue: ***And to whom does Jesus say that honor and glory belong?*** (to God alone)
7. Say: ***Let us conclude by praying silently for Church, political, business, educational, family, and youth leaders so that they may see their leadership as a responsibility to serve.*** Allow a few moments for silent prayer. Then pray aloud together the *Glory Be to the Father*.

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Family Connection

Gospel Reading *Matthew 23:1-12*

Jesus warns against following the example of the scribes and the Pharisees and teaches that those who would be great must be servants.

“Do as I say, not as I do.”

How many of us have been tempted to say this to our children?

In today's Gospel we hear a resounding reply from Jesus, **“Practice what you preach.”**

Those who know us best, our family and especially our children, can identify the inconsistencies between what we want to teach and the example that we give.

The challenge for all of us, especially for those of us who are parents, is to model with consistency **the faith and the Christian way of life we wish to teach our children.**

As you gather as a family, talk about what it means to practice what you preach. Identify some examples of people you know who practice what they preach. What do you observe about these people? What do you admire about them?

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus talk about the importance of acting in ways that are consistent with our faith.

Read together today's Gospel, Matthew 23:1-12.

Talk together about ways in which your family might better practice the faith that you profess.

Choose one action to take that will show your faith in action.

Pray together that your family's faith will be shown consistently in your actions.

Pray the Prayer for Vocations.