

Sunday's Gospel: May the Greatest be Your Servant

Gospel for Sunday in the 31st Week of Ordinary Time (Year A), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 23:1-12*)

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will

not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Commentary

This Sunday's Gospel passage offers a collection of Jesus' instructions for his disciples. Above all, our Lord warns against the vice of severity and the search for the applause and recognition of others. From the criticisms that Jesus makes of those who occupied positions of authority, we can deduce how deeply rooted a rigid attitude was in many of them, combined with the desire for people's adulation. In this regard, Pope Francis said that "authority arises from a good example, so as to help others to practise what is right and proper, sustaining them in the trials that they meet on the right path. Authority is a help, but if it is wrongly exercised, it becomes oppressive; it does not allow people to grow, and creates a climate of distrust and hostility, and also leads to corruption."^[1]

Bad authority figures and teachers, including bad parents, often lay

down excessive rules or decrees in order to feel obeyed, while they consider themselves exempt from living them. Commenting on this passage, a Father of the Church advised: “In every aspect of your life, always try to be austere towards yourself and merciful towards others; may people hear you demanding little and see you doing a lot.”^[2]

Hence, in order to spread the Gospel message effectively, the importance of a consistent life, good example, faithful correspondence between what one says and does. “Good example and the careful fulfillment of our professional, family, and social obligations are indispensable for helping others to follow our Lord,” the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote in this regard.^[3] And when it comes to instructing others, we need to try “to make the truth lovable,” Blessed Alvaro del Portillo insisted. We need

to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, trying above all to understand them. As Saint Josemaría wrote: "When I speak to you of good example, I mean to tell you also that you have to understand and excuse, that you have to fill the world with peace and love" (*The Forge*, 560).

Jesus also refers here to the essential virtue of humility, without which it is impossible to make progress in the interior life and even less to bear apostolic fruit. Whoever in any way feels superior to others is already choking the channels of grace. In contrast, those who know how blessed they are by God without any merit on their own part will be able to transmit to others, with simplicity and joy, what they have received. Pope Francis insisted: "We are all brothers and sisters and in no way must we try to dominate others or look down on them. No. We are all brothers and sisters. If we have

received talents from the heavenly Father, we must place them at the service of our brothers and sisters, and not exploit them for our own satisfaction and personal interests. We must not consider ourselves superior to others; modesty is essential for a life that seeks to conform to the teaching of Jesus, who is meek and humble of heart and came not to be served but to serve. May the Virgin Mary, 'humble and exalted more than any creature' (Dante, *Paradiso*, 33:2), help us, with her motherly intercession, to spurn pride and vanity, and to be meek and docile to the love that comes from God, for the service of our brothers and sisters and for their joy, which will also be our own.”^[4]

^[1] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, November 5, 2017.

^[2] Pseudo-Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum*, hom. 43.

^[3] Fernando Ocáriz, *Letter February 14, 2017*, no. 12.

^[4] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, November 5, 2017.

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