

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Malachi 1: 14b-2:2b, 8-10](#)

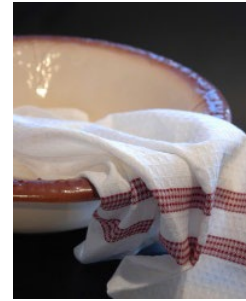
[Responsorial Psalm: 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51](#)

[Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/110523.cfm>



The Book of Malachi was written between 500 and 450 BC after the Jewish community had returned from Babylon. Malachi means messenger, and his message is that one must honestly serve God and not simply do religious things. In the passage for today, he confronts the priests about misusing their legitimate authority, showing partiality in their decisions, and failing to offer authentic teaching. While Jewish priesthood is often associated with temple sacrifice, they were also to instruct in the ways of God. In time, the instruction aspect became associated with the rabbis of the Pharisaic tradition, which had only begun to develop during the exile in Babylon.

The passage also refers to God as their one father. While it was not a predominant image in the Old Testament scriptures, it was used in attributing that all life comes from God and that all people are related because God is the Father of all. Jesus furthers the development of this aspect of God.

The Gospel begins a chapter with a lengthy denunciation of the Pharisees. While Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees on some matters, he agreed with them on others. These challenges toward them are probably gathered for various situations in support of the conflicts between the early Christian-Jewish communities and the Pharisees' attempts to purify and restructure Judaism following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 AD.

Authentic religious authority comes from God. Jesus exemplified its proper use in placing his life in the service of many and in giving his life so that we may have life. Improper use of religious authority puts the focus on the one exercising authority.

Jesus strives to point this out by discouraging the use of titles. Jesus understood a title as flowing from within a person. It is the real identity of a person. Jesus is the true teacher. God is the true Father and Master of all of life. In our English use of titles, we title more functionally. Anyone who leads a class is a teacher. One who has in-depth knowledge and experience is a master of a craft. All who care for and show love to others are mothers and fathers. Within the church, this functional use of titles is used as well. In calling a priest father, the church recognizes that he functions in the name of God in bringing life to individuals through the sacraments. Teachers are recognized as spokespersons of the truth in the pattern of Jesus, the source of truth.

The Hebrew scriptures refer to God as the father who gave life to all living things. Jesus expands the reference to invite people into having a relationship with God as our Father. For Jesus, God is not just the source of life in an impersonal manner. God is the one who cares for us, guides us day by day, and desires to be part of each person's life. St John presents Jesus saying: "I am the way and the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father.* From now on you do know him and have seen him."

In the passage from Thessalonians, there are two key points. First, Paul is giving thanks for how the Thessalonians received the Gospel message. Paul had great concern for them. He did not want to be a burden to them, so he worked to support himself while ministering to them. He gave himself to them so that they would come to know and love God.

Secondly, Paul describes the heart of the preaching ministry. God works through the humble human efforts of people to bring the Word of God to people. Those preaching must focus on preparing to hear God's work and then share it in a meaningful way with the community. The community must also seek God in the message and discern God's message in the human words of the preacher. When we do not fully understand a preacher's message, we are challenged to seek insight from God about the message God is sending.

Themes:

Humility and pride

Christian servanthood

Role of the Magisterium

Sincerity and Integrity

God's Word at work

Reflection Questions:

How have you seen or experienced leaders misuse their power?

How does misuse of power render the Gospel message ineffective?

How does being a servant to others combat individualism and self-promotion?

How are you serving others by participating in communal worship?

How is the Word of God at work in you? How has it influenced a decision you made?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the grace of humility: that we may relate with one another as companions on the journey and strive to serve the needs of one another compassionately

For the grace of conversion: that we may allow God to transform our hypocritical parts into dynamic and authentic witnesses of the truth

For all leaders of the Christian Community: that they may manifest the love and compassion of God in their words and deeds and strengthen the community in fulfilling their vocations

For discerning hearts: that we may hear the Word of God as it comes to us in Scripture, in preaching, and in words of those who love us

For all preachers: that their hearts may be open to God's word and that the Spirit use their gifts to inspire faith and deeper commitment amongst their listeners

For all who exercise authority and leadership: that they may never place unreasonable burdens on those whom they serve