

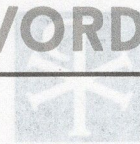
Read

Malachi 1:14b–2:2b,
8–10

Psalms 131:1, 2, 3

1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13

Matthew 23:1–12



Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 5, 2023

LECTIONARY W52A
Malachi 1:14b–2:2b-8-10
Psalms 131:1, 2, 3
1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9, 13
Matthew 23:1-12



REFLECTION

In today's reading Jesus scolds the scribes and Pharisees for talking the talk but not walking the walk. The Pharisees were a group within the Jewish community that were highly educated in the religious laws. The Gospel writers usually portray them being so focused on their teachings that they often missed God's message of forgiveness, mercy, equality, and love. Today's Gospel reminds us that it isn't enough to show up at church every Sunday if we don't act out our Christian values during the week.

One of the ways we can "walk the talk" is by living out the principles of Catholic social teaching. These teachings help us make decisions about how to live our faith outside of Mass when we are going about our daily activities. Just like the Pharisees were called out for quoting scripture without loving their neighbors, we too are called to incorporate the teaching of the Church into our lives.



ACTION

Take some time this week to look up the seven themes of Catholic social teaching (see the link below) and read a little bit about each one. Choose one you are most curious about and find a news story that relates to that particular teaching. You'll see that it is possible for the teachings of the Church to guide our decisions and shape our worldview outside of Mass. Then pick one of the themes of Catholic social teaching and make a plan for incorporating it into your activities this week.



Learn about Catholic social teaching here: <https://www.crs.org/resource-center/CST-101>

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Which of the seven themes of Catholic social teaching do you find most relevant for our society? Why?
- ❖ How do the themes of Catholic social teaching challenge you to be a better Christian?



November 5, 2023

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #151A

Malachi 1:14b–2:2b, 8–10

Psalm 131:1, 2, 3

1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13

Matthew 23:1–12

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In today's Gospel context, Jesus is speaking with the crowds and the disciples about the Pharisees and their behavior. He notes that their thoughts and beliefs are based on the law of Moses and that is good and upright. The faithful are to listen to what they preach. He goes on to say that their actions, however, do not match up with what they preach. Today's reflection invites the teens to consider how they have experienced that in their own lives, where people in authority might not "practice what they preach." They are also invited to consider how their own actions don't always match the faith they profess. Jesus reminds us that humility is the attitude of discipleship, putting others first and trusting in God.

Q FOCUS: *In our faith, our actions can speak louder than our words.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On November 9, we celebrate the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome. Many think that St. Peter's is the pope's home church since he is there so often, but the Lateran Basilica is where the pope holds his official seat as the bishop of Rome; it is his home cathedral. The basilica is named in honor of St. John the Baptist, but also includes the name "Lateran" for the family who once owned the land in the fourth century. Even though the majority of Catholics don't live in the diocese of

Rome, we celebrate this church because it represents the universal church and the unity we have under the servant leadership of the pope.

Church Teaching Connection

"To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. . . . Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. Gal 5:22-23)" (*Gaudete et exsultate*, 14–15).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 23:1-12

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow

their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus speaks very clearly to the disciples and to the crowd that is gathered. He tells the crowd that the Pharisees have set their teachings on Moses' law and that is a good thing. In doing so, he creates a common ground between himself and this group that are normally seen as the antagonists in the Gospel. It is important to remember that Jesus himself was a faithful Jew and would have followed the law of Moses and participated in the religious festivals and rituals of his time. But that doesn't stop Jesus from also calling the Pharisees out and showing them that their actions don't really reflect God's law. He warns the people and the disciples not to follow the actions of the Pharisees.

► **What are some examples of shortcuts you or others have tried to take or when have you tried to get something done more quickly but didn't give it your best effort?**

► **Have you seen others put in the least amount of effort and still claim to be doing their best?**

This is part of the point Jesus was making in this Gospel passage. The Pharisees were saying the right things and it looked like they were doing the right things, but Jesus knew better; their actions were superficial and were meant to enhance their status. Jesus says to do what the Pharisees say, not what they do. Actions speak louder than words, right? Unfortunately, the Pharisees know the words but don't follow through on the actions. Jesus also points out that the Pharisees place many rules on the people as they try to obey God but that they don't see the suffering of others and they don't reach out to help them. Being demanding of someone and not willing to help them does not bring holiness to anyone.

► **What might it feel like to have a burden or obligation placed upon you that you don't see others following?**

Jesus goes on to point out that the Pharisees want to be seen. They want others to outwardly regard them with respect and dignity as leaders of the local religious community. While recognition is not a bad thing, the way the Pharisees go about getting it is. It feels good to be recognized—for something good that you do, for a good grade you earned, for a good recital you had, for a good game you played, and so on. Eliciting that feeling for the wrong reasons, though, is what the Pharisees were doing. They were praying in public, not out of a desire to be close to God or help others be close to him. They were praying in the open to draw attention to themselves.

Our intentions are an important part of our actions. We know that our faith is not something to show off about. Rather, we should adopt an attitude of humble faithfulness.

► **What are some ways that you could show your faith, while still remaining humble? Another term we sometimes use is "servant leadership"—what might that look like in your life?**

We are called to follow God's commandments and the teachings of our faith. These put us in relationship with God and call us to serve others out of love for them and in imitation of Christ.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 62.

Your actions speak louder than your words.

Servant leadership is the path to holiness.

Inward dignity speaks higher than public recognition.

Act on the Word

Do As I Say

For this activity, you will need access to the song "Truth Be Told" by Matthew West.

Lead the group in a game of Simon Says with the youth minister being "Simon." Start the game out as normal: "Simon says touch your toes." (The leader touches her toes as well.) "Simon says touch your nose." (The leader also continues to do the actions.) After everyone gets the hang of the game, continue the commands but do different actions with each command. For example, if Simon says, "Simon says touch your ears," have the leader touch her nose instead. Play several rounds, switching between having the leader match words and action and having the words and actions not match. The teens who do not follow the spoken command correctly are out. Continue playing until there is a winner.

After the game, lead the teens in a brief reflection about following what the word of God looks like in their lives. Some questions to guide the reflection include the following:

- ✳ How did it feel to hear one command but see a different one?
- ✳ Are there things we say we do but we really don't? Do we try to give false impressions of ourselves?

✳ How can you serve others but still be a leader?

What does that look like in your life?

✳ Who can you check in with on a regular basis to make sure you are really walking the walk of faith and not pretending?

Conclude the discussion by reminding the teens that no one is perfect and we have to always rely on God to show us the right path. Being weak and honest is better than being strong and misleading. Play the song "Truth Be Told" by Matthew West and encourage the teens to listen to it throughout the week during their prayer time as they ask God to show them how they should live their faith.

Closing Prayer

Lord,

you hold the truth for us.

In humility we come seeking your

guidance so that sin does not have

power over us.

Fill us with your gift of wisdom

and may we live days of prayer and grace.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.