

BIBLE STUDY

THIRTY- FIRST SUNDAY IN ORODINARY TIME YEAR A

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Parishes

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“The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” Mat. 23:12

Reading I: Malachi 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10

LIVE WHAT YOU PREACH! What happens when the leaders of a community stop leading? What happens when preachers don't practice what they preach? What happens when parents don't practice what they teach? We often say one thing, profess belief in one thing and do another. What is the price of living a dual or hypocritical life? Are we willing to pay the price? We often use the smoke and mirrors of deception to pretend that we are what we are not. This is a trap of pride devised by the great deceiver. Hypocrisy deadens our awareness of God's purpose for us. But Jesus provides the escape for our hypocrisy. Echoing the words in Revelation 3:1, Jesus tells us, as the angel told the church of Sardis, "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead." Before Him, we are radically



**Has not the one God
created us?**

Him, we are radically exposed. He helps us to escape the trap of hypocrisy and live what we preach.

Hypocrisy is the subject of this reading from Malachi and the Gospel. Like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus, the priests of the temple in Malachi's day were leaders who were expected to guide and instruct the people by word and example. This book named Malachi, which means "My Messenger" in Hebrew, is likely the work of an anonymous prophet who lived in Jerusalem around the year 450 B.C. The Jews returned from Babylon through the benevolence of Cyrus in 538 B.C. (See first reading, or 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time) The new temple of Jerusalem was completed around 515 B. C. The preaching of Zechariah and Haggai marked a return to zealous observance of the law. But by the time of the prophet Malachi's preaching, the priests and leaders had grown lax and in some cases abandoned the Law of Moses. Verses 6-13 list the offenses committed by the priests. Leviticus 22:17-25 list some of their duties. They did not live what they preached. Their conduct caused others to turn away from God. DISCUSSION QUESTION: Do you live what you preach? How has a scandal in the church affected you?

Book of Malachi

The contents of the book are comprised in four chapters. In the Hebrew text the third and fourth chapters form but one. The whole consists of three sections, preceded by an introduction ([Mal 1:1-5](#)), in which the prophet reminds Israel of Jehovah's love to them. The first section ([1:6-2:9](#)) contains a stern rebuke addressed to the priests who had despised the name of Jehovah, and had been leaders in a departure from His worship and from the covenant, and also for their partiality in administering the law. In the second section ([2:9-16](#)) the people are rebuked for their intermarriages with idolatrous heathens. In the third, ([2:17-4:6](#)) he addresses the people as a whole, and warns them of the coming of the God of judgment, preceded by the advent of the Messiah.

This book is frequently referred to in the New Testament ([Matt 11:10](#); [17:12](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [9:11,12](#); [Luke 1:17](#); [Rom 9:13](#)).

Book of Malachi, Phylacteries Easton's Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved

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

LIVE WHAT YOU PREACH! In this portion of the Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul shows that he lived what he preached. His ministry reflected the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He preached the Gospel to them after having been persecuted in Philippi (vv. 2-4). He offered his life as an example for the Thessalonian Christians to follow.

In verse 9, St. Paul showed that he loved them enough not to burden them while he preached the Gospel. St. Paul revealed to the Thessalonians that what they received was a living sacrifice. That is, he not only wanted to share the Word of God, but he wanted to share himself. He preached the Word of God, but he did not ask them to do more than he himself would do for Christ. The Thessalonians accepted Christ, not because Paul or anybody else preached to them, but because of God's revelation. That revelation was an active part of their daily lives. St. Paul's greatest sermon was his life. He lived what he preached. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Compare St. Paul to the priests, Sadducees and Pharisees in the first reading and the Gospel. Compare him to priests and religious of this day.

Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

LIVE WHAT YOU PREACH! "Hypocrisy" refers to the act of claiming to believe something, but acting in a different manner. The word is of Greek origin, which means "actor"—literally one who wears a mask. Don King, the celebrated boxing promoter says that: "Hypocrisy is the mother of all evil and racial prejudice is still her favorite child". The Christian, therefore, is challenged to preach God's law of love by the way we live.

The dialogue between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in Matthew comes to an end in these twelve verses. The debate now gives way to condemnation of the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders. The chapter is not only a depiction of corruption among Israel's teachers. It is also a warning to Christian leaders of the pitfalls of pastoral ministry. The purpose of the criticism of the Jewish leaders is to unmask their infidelity. Simultaneously, Jesus respected their authority. The reference to the *Chair of Moses* is likely a stone seat placed prominently in Jewish synagogues that was reserved for the person who presided over the weekly liturgy. (Acts 15:21). The chair symbolized the authority to teach the law to the congregation. Catholic churches retain a similar configuration today.

Jesus urged the faithful to observe whether the leaders practiced what they preached. He observed the Jewish leaders were given to showy worship, rather than spiritual development. They placed burdens of the law on people, but they themselves failed to follow the very law that they imposed. (v.4) They just wanted to be seen. Their prayers were to attract others; their ministry was just a show, rather than a service. They sought to be served rather than to serve. By contrast, Jesus called His yoke easy and His burden light. (Mt. 11:29) Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit that enables God's people to obey the Law of God, which is love. (Mt. 3:11 and Exek. 36:25)

Though this reading may give some the impression that Jesus was opposed to religious dress (vv. 6-9). He was not. He did not oppose religious dress, or the titles of Rabbi or Master. Here, Jesus criticizes calling attention to our practice of religion for to receive honor from people, rather than the approval of God. Jesus concludes that humility is the quality of the faithful. The one who humbles himself will be exalted. (Phil 2:5-11) A true disciple of Christ preaches and practices humility. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Why are you Catholic? Why are you in ministry? If you are not in ministry, why not? Why do we call priests "father"?

Pray About It.

Monday

Read Mat. 23:1-12. Do you live what you preach?

Tuesday

Read 1 Thes. 2:9. What burdens do we place on others? Today lighten their load.

Wednesday

Read 1 Thes. 2:10. How do you behave toward others who are not Christian?

Thursday

Read 1 Thes. 2:8, Visit or call someone who is ill.

Friday

Read Mt. 23:11. Pray for the grace of humility.

What is a Phylactery?

Phylacteries — (Gr. *phulakteria*; i.e., "defenses" or "protections"), called by modern Jews *tephillin* (i.e., "prayers") are mentioned only in [Matt 23:5](#). They consisted of strips of parchment on which were inscribed these four texts: (1.) [Ex 13:1-10](#); (2.) [11-16](#); (3.) [Deut 6:4-9](#); (4.) [11:18-21](#), and which were enclosed in a square leather case, on one side of which was inscribed the Hebrew letter shin, to which the rabbis attached some significance. This case was fastened by certain straps to the forehead just between the eyes. The "making broad the phylacteries" refers to the enlarging of the case to make it conspicuous.

Another form of the phylactery consisted of two rolls of parchment, on which the same texts were written, enclosed in a case of black calfskin. This was worn on the left arm near the elbow, to which it was bound by a thong. It was called the "*Tephillah*" on the arm. (*Phylacteries Easton's Bible Dictionary, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003, 2006 BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.*)

Resources: The Sunday Readings Cycle A Kevin O'Sullivan, O.F.M. Franciscan Herald Press 1971, P369. *The Gospel of Matthew*, Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri ©2001, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids Mi. p.292.; <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-hypocrisy.html>; Don King Quotes. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc, 2017. <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/d/donking471192.html>, accessed October 30, 2017. *1 Thessalonians*, Ivan Havener, O.S.B.; Collegeville Bible Commentary, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minn., p. 1151-1159; *Living Liturgy Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities Year A 2014*, Joyce Zimmerman, C. PP. S. Kathleen Harmon, S.N.D. de N., Christopher W. Canlon, S. M. Liturgical Press Collegeville, Mn. pp. 238-241; Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner. The Philanthropic Trends Digest 7:13 [June 1, 1990]

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