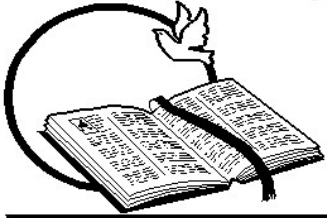


Living the Gospel in Everyday Life....



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 30, 2011
Matthew 22:1-12



What's Going On Here?

GOSPEL: 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."

TALKING AND WALKING THE TRUTH. Over the last several weeks, those who have issues with authority figures, might have felt a twinge of satisfaction as Jesus chastised the Jewish leaders who rejected him and his mission of love. Matthew doesn't leave anyone out in today's Gospel. He reminds the crowds how easy it is to excuse bad choices by blaming those who "lead us astray." And he speaks to leaders who make light of their own bad behavior by saying, "I'm only human. Do as I say, not as I do." Jesus doesn't let anyone off the hook. Following on his words of two weeks ago, when he said, "You know the difference between right and wrong," today he calls us to take responsibility for our actions. Once we have come of age, we know: the law is written on our hearts. While we might still look to our leaders for help and direction, we should know better than to place them on pedestals, pretending they can do no wrong. We can be inspired by good leaders or disappointed by those who talk the talk but do not walk the walk. Just as their goodness cannot force us to do good, their wrongdoing does not force us to do wrong. Those of us who are in any position of leadership are challenged in this Gospel as well. Abuse of power, position for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, failure to set good example, or neglect of one's call to serve cannot be excused by an appeal to human frailty. Jesus shows us the best of human potential and calls us, not to **just make do** but to **make the best** of our humanness. No excuses, no blaming. We have but one master - Jesus. He is the one who has the words - and the actions - of eternal life.

Questions For Reflection

* In which group do I find myself, the crowd or the leaders? Even if I am usually part of the crowd, is there any way in which I might sometimes be a "leader"? What do I hear Jesus saying to me?

* What is it that makes leadership positions so important? Is Gospel importance different from popular culture's view of importance?

* Is there less responsibility for the one who is part of the crowd? Why or why not?

* In what ways can I (do I) "hide" in either group?

* How does the philosophy of "prayer, preparation, and proclamation" apply here?