

Liturgy of the Word for Children

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Please Note: All scripture readings must be read from the Children's Lectionary

Opening Prayer:

God, our Maker,
 all people are important to you
 and you despise no one.
 Do not let us think we are more important than others,
 but make us more like Jesus,
 who loved especially those who were rejected.
 May we understand better
 that to know we really need you is to be filled with your gifts.
 We pray this prayer to you through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Reading: Malachi 1:8-10

This is what God says to the priests of Israel: "You have turned away from my ways. You have led my people away because of the things you teach. You have not kept my covenant, and you teach only what you want to teach and not the whole truth. So I will let the people see how wrong you are, and they will turn away from you."

The prophet Malachi said to the people: "We have all been created by the same God, haven't we? Then why are we dishonest with each other? Why do we break the covenant of our family and hurt one another?"

Gospel Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

(This reading is to be used for personal study. It should not be used in liturgy.)

Then 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 Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

You Are the Greatest!: Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel story, Jesus tells the people how to be "great" in God's eyes. He says, "The greatest among you must be your servant."

You are the greatest when you help someone else without being asked. You are the greatest when you treat others with kindness and love.

You are the greatest when you help other people to feel good by the nice things you say about them to everyone around you.

Whenever you put someone else first, and when you do it with love, you are acting as Jesus did and ... **YOU ARE THE GREATEST!**

Wisdom from the Unwise: Gospel Reflection

"Don't do as I do! Do as I say!"

Has anyone in authority ever said these words, or similar ones, to you? We tend to ignore that kind of advice. "Example is the best teacher," we say. But today Jesus tells us to "do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach" (Matthew 23:3). So our typical excuses for not listening, such as that "they should practice what they preach," ultimately won't excuse us from responsible behavior.

WORDS!

We can have a lot of fun with words. We can use words to make people laugh and to help others feel better.

But we can also use words to hurt people and to make ourselves feel important.

That's how the Pharisees were using God's words in today's Scripture reading. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites.

They pretended to be very holy and very proper and very smart. They claimed to know exactly what God wanted. They spoke of God's laws and of God's judgment and of God's punishments. But Jesus spoke of God's love and of God's mercy and of God's infinite compassion.

Words can hurt and words can heal. Words can lie and words can speak truth. How do you use your words?

AND MORE WORDS!

Have you ever thought about Jesus' words in today's gospel? He says, "Call no one your father on earth," but we call our male parents "father" and we call priests "father." He says, too, to call no one "rabbi" or "teacher," but we do, of course. We have been carefully taught to use these forms of address. Why?

Jesus wasn't telling the people to avoid the words per se. He is merely reminding us here that the authority and power of those who hold such titles comes from God, who is perfect father and perfect rabbi, or teacher. So when we call a parent or a priest "father," the title should remind both him and us that he is a servant of the perfect Father.

AND ACTIONS!

Some people think the way to win friends and be popular is to always agree with everything anybody says -- even if they don't ... really...

Gary said to Marlin that Lyndel was a jerk. Marlin agreed, "Boy, is he ever! A real first-class nerd!"

But when Gary wasn't around, Marlin acted like Lyndel's best friend.

Lyndel told Marlin that Gary was arrogant and a liar. Marlin agreed, "You can say that again! I wouldn't believe a word that hot-shot said!"

But when Lyndel wasn't around, Marlin hung on Gary's every remark.

It didn't take people long to figure out that Marlin's actions did not agree with his words. Instead of friends and popularity, he'd earned himself a reputation -- as an arrogant, lying jerk!

I Am the Greatest!: Class or Family Activity

Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant." Why not make this "I am the greatest!" week? Tear enough scraps of paper for everybody in your class or your family, mark one of the scraps with an X, mix them up in a bag, and let everybody draw one. The person who draws the X is "greatest" for the day.

The "greatest" must concentrate on being a good servant that entire day, helping wherever needed at home or at school.

A good servant should also be ready to serve the wider community. Think of something you can do for a neighbor (run an errand, take out the trash), or some talent you could share with the people at Church (sing in the choir, work on a banner).

This service doesn't have to be done on your "I am the greatest" day, but try to do something before the end of the week.

Prayers of the Faithful: Allow a few moments for the children to offer prayers aloud for their special intentions. Ask them to end with "Let us pray to the Lord". All respond, "Lord, Hear our Prayer".

Apostle's Creed: You may end the Liturgy of the Word by reciting the Creed as a group if there is time.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

The scriptures give us many images of God: shepherd, king, eagle with her young, and so forth. Today's readings suggest the image of God as creative parent.

The reading from *Malachi* is a plea for unity, both in what is taught and in the relationships among the believers. The motivation for this unity is we have all been created by the same God.

Our Gospel for today presents the same, with a little more expansion. Malachi rebukes the priests of his time for not teaching the truth. Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who don't practice what they teach! His lesson ends with the same call to unity we find in *Malachi*. We are to call no one on earth master because we all have one Master. That truth motivates our equality.

If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS WITH CHILDREN:

Both points of today's focus should be discussed. Help the children see that God is beyond *all* images. We can't see God. We don't know really what God is like. But we see what God does. So we say God is *like* (acts like) a shepherd because God guides and cares for us. God is also like a mother, a king, an eagle, a father, and so forth. These images help us to know God better. But God is not really any of those things. God acts like those things. This notion of images for God is extremely important in order that the children not be fixated on any one image. The multiple images of God in scripture give us a wonderful freedom in relating to God. Each of us finds in scripture those images most helpful to ourselves. We can, by presenting many images, help children grow in their relationship with God.

Ask the children:

- How is God like a mother or father?

Lead the discussion along these lines (if possible in your situation.) Children who have the same father or mother are brothers and sisters. Malachi and Jesus tell us that because we all have the same God, who is like a father or mother, we are brothers and sisters. Explore that image (brothers and sisters) with the children. How do brothers and sisters act toward one another? Help them see that this is what Jesus means by "If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else." For Jesus, no one is better than anyone else. We are all equal and should serve one another.

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thought for the day

Our lives need to reflect our faith; we are not just called to tell the good news but to live it as well.

Readings

Malachi 1:14—2:2, 8–10

1 Thessalonians 2:7–9, 13

Matthew 23:1–12

Aim: To know that Jesus wants our lives to reflect our faith in God.

Starter

Cut some stencils of simple shapes from card, or use bought ones, and have lengths of lining paper for the children to cover with shapes using paint and sponges. Protect their clothing thoroughly, and have washing-up bowls of warm soapy water and towels so that the cleaning-up process is straightforward.

Teaching

Admire the completed length of paper. How come the shapes are all the same, even though different people were making them? The stencils made it possible for all the children to reproduce the designs faithfully and exactly, so that they could make this patterned wall hanging.

Today we are going to look at how the pattern of our living can be shaped by God guiding us. Pick up one of the stencil shapes. If I want to make this shape exactly, I have to use it. That's like us in our Christian life. If we want to act in a loving, right way, we need the loving righteous God to live by. Just as I have to get in touch with the stencil shape to use it, we have to get in touch with God each day to be like him. That's called *praying*. (Display a sign of praying hands and the word "Praying" with it.)

Just picking up the stencil won't make the shape, though. I have to use it. Fill a sponge and stencil a shape. As you do so, talk about the way you are keeping to the shape and trying not to go over the edges. It's the same with our Christian life. When we have got in touch with God, we go and live through the day, keeping to God's guidelines of love and truth. That way, whatever colors the day gives us, whether they are bright ones or dark ones, we'll be able to make with them the pattern of God's loving nature. The way we live will be showing other people the love we know God has for us and them.

Praying

Lord Jesus, may my life
be a pattern of your loving,
your truth and your faithfulness,
so that others can see
that I am your friend and follower.

Activities

There is space on the activity sheet for some more printing, using some bright and some dark colors, so that the children see that God's pattern of loving can be shown in both happy and sad times, both easy and difficult times.

Notes

Thirty-First Sunday of the Year

Practice what you preach

INTRODUCTION

The Pharisees were the leaders of the Jewish people. They studied the scriptures and were very proud that they obeyed the Jewish law. The ordinary people looked to the Pharisees for good example, but Jesus told his followers that they did not practice what they preached.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

LIGHT THE CANDLES

Light the candles and sing the Candle Song together.

SORRY

Close your eyes and listen to this reading:

Lord, those who turn away from you do wrong;
those who are wise worship you.

Lord, you see all that we do;
help us to do what is right.

(Psalm 15:2-3)

Allow the children a few moments to think about these words before reading the following slowly:

If we have chosen the wrong way
and made a mistake,
Lord, have mercy.

If we have forgotten
to share your love with others,
Christ, have mercy.

If we have spoiled our friendship with you
and made you sad,
Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

To welcome today's Gospel sing Acclamation 5.

GOSPEL (MATTHEW 23:1-12)

Jesus said to the crowds, "Listen to what the Pharisees tell you and do what they say, but do not copy what they do. They do not put their words into actions or practice what they preach. They are full of self-importance and pride, and you must not follow their example. Only God is important and you must be ready to serve him and one another."

DISCUSSION

Jesus said that the Pharisees did not practice what they preached. What does this mean? It means that the Pharisees did not match what they said with what they did. They told everyone what the law said they must do, but then they did not do it themselves. They did not put the words that they preached into action.

We still use this saying today, because we are all very good at telling everyone else what they should do, but we aren't very good at actually doing it ourselves. Can you think of examples in everyday life when people don't "practice what they preach"?

—When you visit a friend's house to play, you might remind them that they should share a precious toy, but you don't share your favorite toys at home.

—If someone else does something wrong, you expect them to say "sorry" right away, but are you always ready to say "sorry" when you get it wrong yourself?

If we tell someone else what they should do, then we should be ready to do that thing ourselves.

Jesus wanted us to understand that if we want to share the message of his love with others, then it is important for us to do what we say and show our goodness by our actions. By showing others how much we care for each other, our words are not just empty sounds, they are put into loving action.

ACTIVITY

Hand out copies of the drawing and talk about the pictures with the children. Who is being helpful and kind, and who isn't? Have them add a few drawings of their own in the space provided.

CREED

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, help us to make our actions
speak louder than our words,
So that others will see
that we belong to Christ
and may believe in you.