

HOMILY 31ST SUN OT YRA 2017

I was driving across town to the east side on the freeway the other day. I was driving 70 miles per hour, which is the speed limit, in the center lane. Suddenly I noticed in my rear view mirror that someone was speeding up behind me flashing their lights. I thought: "I guess they want me to get out of their way." Before I could do anything, they pulled up next to me to my left and the woman in the passenger seat shows me her fingers, but not all of them at the same time if you know what I mean. And then she cut right in front of me and speed off. And when they got in front of me I noticed the sign on the back of their car. It was a picture of Our Lady of Fatima with the words: "Pray the Rosary." Now if someone gets that angry about me driving the speed limit in the middle lane, it has nothing to do with me, so I could easily just let that go. But what I had a hard time letting go of was the sign on the back of their car. It is pretty much an advertisement that they are Catholic, and if they are going to act that way I wish they would get rid of the sign. I wondered why they had that sign on their car. Like if they have a picture of Our Lady of Fatima they are covered and they can act however they like? It seems kind of hypocritical.

I think that is exactly what Jesus is criticizing in the Gospel reading today. Jesus is not criticizing all Pharisees. I am sure there were very good Pharisees. He was not criticizing what they were preaching. He says observe what they tell you but do not follow their example. He was criticizing the Pharisees that do not practice what they preach. He was criticizing the hypocrisy. Jesus says that they widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels so they look good, and they do it so people look up to them and give them places of honor. Not only are they hypocrites, I don't think they even know that they are hypocrites. Since they do not know they are hypocrites, there is no possibility that they are going to change.

The message that Jesus is giving all of us today is that we have to strive to live what we say we believe. Now none of us are perfect. There is a hypocrite in all of us but Christ is in all of us as well. We have to make sure that the Christ in us is winning. We need to strive to be people of integrity. That means forming and examining our being very consciences, identifying what is the right thing to do, and then doing it even when no one is looking, even when we have nothing to gain personally, even when it is the more difficult thing to do, even if we suffer personally because of it. And I think most of the time if we just stop and ask ourselves, what is the right thing to do, what is the loving thing to do, what would Jesus do, we can very quickly figure it out. We have to have the courage to do it.

Jesus also tells them not to call anyone on earth father, Rabbi or Master. Just an aside, some people say that they cannot call a priest father because of this passage. Scripture scholars tell us that a literal translation of what Jesus said is: “Call no one on earth my father.” He is really saying call no one on earth God.” It is not about the titles, it is about following someone else before God. Jesus is always our model, and he always models humble service to us. People of integrity are people of humble service. Not we all have mentors and teachers in our lives. Some of them are assigned, some of them we get to choose. If we choose them, we need to be careful of who we choose. When I was younger I did not think much about it. When I got my first professional job I just picked someone who seemed to be moving up, thinking they might take me with them. As I have gotten older, I pick someone that I want to be like. I pick people of integrity, people who are humble servants. I don’t pick people who are out for themselves. They do not care about me. Whether we pick our teachers or mentors, we have to be very careful of what we emulate. Take the good they can share with you and leave the rest. We need to purposely strive to be people of integrity, people of humble service.