



## *Homily – 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)<sup>i</sup>*

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*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Again this week in our Gospel reading for this Holy Mass we have just heard another story of Jesus' reflections on the Pharisees and the scribes.

For the past few weeks in our Sunday readings, the Church has been giving us Gospel passages like this one today. And we can see how there was tension between Jesus and the religious authorities of his time. And little by little we see that the conflict is getting stronger.

In the last two weeks, we have heard how the leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, tried to trap Jesus with some tricky questions — first about taxes and then about the Law of Moses.

Today Jesus is kind of giving a “closing argument” or his final opinion about these religious leaders.

And I think it all comes down to one point. He says of these leaders, “For they *preach* but they do not *practice*,” Jesus says.

We have heard Jesus say before that they were hypocrites. That they had no authenticity. That they were saying one thing but they do another thing.

But even more interesting in today's passage of the Gospel is that Jesus is not just criticizing them. Today he's not speaking directly to the Pharisees and scribes. He is still talking *about* them, about the way they behave. But Jesus is talking *to* his disciples and to the crowds, and obviously to each one of us.

He is telling us that we cannot be like the Pharisees and scribes. He wants us to know that our way of doing things — our behavior, our attitudes, our approach to life — must be different if we are going to be his disciples.

Basically he is saying that to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we have to really live the faith we profess. We have to practice what we believe. We have to try to be faithful to God and the teachings of his Church in *everything* we do.

So our readings today, and what Jesus is talking about today, are about our faith and the way we live our faith.

That's the first thing I think we need to do — and that is to reflect on the beauty of the gift of faith.

It is really a gift that we have from God. And it is easy to take it for granted. So today let's ask for the grace to understand that our faith is a beautiful and precious gift from God.

Also, as we reflect on this gift, we understand that, unfortunately, this is a gift that other people do not have. So many people do not know this gift. It is sad. We all know some people who have lost their faith or some people whom, for whatever reason, are having trouble accepting this beautiful gift that God wants to give them.

But in order to really see that, we have to believe — and we do, that's why we are here today — that we have this beautiful gift from God, the gift of faith.

We also have to pray for the Church's mission of the new evangelization. Because the people of our day are really longing for the gift of faith.

When look at our society and the challenges that we have in our country, in our world, my brothers and sisters, we know that the solution to those challenges is in our faith.

We know that God wants us to find peace in our society. That God wants us to have a happy life. That God wants us to really find a way, as a society, that we can love each other in our daily life. But, as we are witnesses, unfortunately in our society sometimes, faith is not a priority for people.

That is what it is so important for us to feel responsibility for the new evangelization. We all have the beautiful duty of sharing the joy of our Christian faith with others.

And that is also why it is so important, the second part of the reflection we find in today's readings.

First we have to value the gift of faith. Secondly, we have to see how important it is for us to share our faith with our brothers and sisters. And then, at the same time, we have to understand that the best way to do that is for us to practice what we believe.

That's why our readings today all talk about the importance of really living our faith in God in a consistent way.

In our first reading, the prophet Malachi criticizes the religious leaders of his day. And he also says that these leaders — by their bad example — have caused others to turn away from God and his covenant also.

In the Gospel, as we were just reflecting before, Jesus says that the scribes and the Pharisees do the same. He says that by their bad example they are making God's Law a burden — something that is not attractive to others, something that is too hard for people to follow in their daily lives.

So for us: Once we value the gift of faith and feel the urgency of sharing the gift of faith with others, we have to ask for the grace to be, or at least to try to be, good examples for others around us.

Everyone should be able to see the difference our faith makes in our lives — in how we think, how we act, in our acts of charity and love for others.

People should be able to point to each one of us and say, "That's what a Christian looks like."

What a beautiful challenge, my brothers and sisters.

That people can say when they see us — acting, talking, behaving — "There is somebody that I can follow." Not because we are proud people, but on the contrary, because we know that we have a wonderful gift; because we know our own weakness and limitations, but we see the grace of God acting in our lives and helping us to become a good example for others.

So how can we become better witnesses, better examples of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? What can we do to know the truths of our Catholic faith better? What can we do to live them in a more joyful way?

Yes, we need the grace of God, which we receive especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. But really, when we think about it, one of the best ways that really helps is when we also value our belonging to the Catholic Church.

It is important for us to remember that we are never alone as believers. We are children of God. We belong to his family, the Church.

St. Paul, in the second reading of today's Mass, talks precisely about the importance of the Church in our lives. He gives us this beautiful image of the Church as our Mother — the Mother of the children of God. He says: "We were gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children; with such affection for you ... so dearly beloved you had become to us."

So my brothers and sisters, we need to love the Church! We need to stay faithful *in the Church!* And we need to draw strength and nourishment for our faith from the Church.

As children of God, we live by the grace that Jesus Christ gives us in the sacraments and we practice our faith *in* the Church, as the family of God.

That's why it is so important for us not just to feel that the Church is a place that we go on Sundays. But that we, the people of God, are active in our society in our daily life — when we go to work, when we do everything that we do. Whether we participate in social life or just try to be an influence in our public life, we should understand that we are the people of God, practicing our faith in our daily life.

One beautiful way of making that happen as part of the family of God, is our participation in the liturgy.

As you know, in a few weeks, at the beginning of Advent, there are going to be some changes in the way we participate in Holy Mass. And today you are going to receive two more of these flyers about our participation in the liturgy.

It is important for all of us to take advantage of this time. As we go through these changes that are going to help us to make our Mass even more active and to celebrate with more reverence, it is important for us to feel that we are growing in our love for Holy Mass, for the Eucharist, for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

So, it is a beautiful family, the family of the Church, and we understand that we have this beautiful gift of God, this gift of faith, that we need to share with the people of our times. And that is God's love for each one of us.

So, let's pray today for the grace to renew our joy in being faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

And let's ask our Blessed Mother Mary, who was the first to believe in him, to help us grow in the virtue of faith and to always practice what we preach in a consistent way.

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<sup>i</sup> Readings: Mal. 1:14–2:2, 8–10; Ps. 131:1–3; 1 Thess. 2:7–9, 13; Matt. 23:1–12.