

**Thirty First Sunday Year A. 5th November 2023. Do not be an instructor only but also a specimen.**

Prophet Malachi wrote in the 5th century B. C after the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, when there was a great laxity and corruption in the worship of God. Priests and the people were cheating God by not giving him the offerings that were rightly due to him and by not living according to his teaching.

The prophet addressed the priests and warned them to change from their evil or God will reprimand them. In chapter 1: 6-8 the priest asked 'How have we despised you? ' The answer they got was by offering worthless food on my altar, and you disrespect me by showing contempt for my altar when you bring a blind or sick or lame animal to sacrifice to me.

If there are people who should respect the altar more, it should be priests because that is where they offer sacrifice to God. But these priests, we are told, took God for granted; they showed no respect to his altar, they failed to tell the people the right thing, and they also segregated by loving the rich and the elite and neglecting the poor. We may be tempted to say that this had happened only in the time of prophet Malachi but that is still happening in our time. Have we not been desecrating the altar? What about our gifts to God, are we not giving him worthless gifts? How about the celebration? Are we faithful to it?

He further speaks against the community because of their unfaithfulness to God. That was because religious leaders were not living an exemplary life. Yes, we are aware of the situation where religious leaders are trying their best to live up to the standard but the faithful are not making any commitment to learn.

In our gospel reading, Jesus told us the flaws of Pharisaic religion.

The Scribes and the Pharisees had a wrong concept of righteousness, they took the seat of Moses, bragging about their position, making a show of themselves in a marketplace and expecting people to greet them. Righteousness is about being humble, showing compassion. The more compassion we are the more we are close to God.

They had a different understanding of Ministry- Jesus came not to be served but serve. Mark 10:45. The purpose of Jesus's ministry is to teach people how to become like God and He Jesus, to identify with humanity. He came to lighten the burden of the people Matt.11:28 not to make the burden heavier. He never asks people to do anything that He has not first done. Do not be an instructor only but also a specimen; no wonder Jesus became a Lamb who was slain (Rev. 13:8) The Pharisees commanded but do not participate in doing it. They are hypocrites.

The Scribes and the Pharisees had flawed notion of greatness- For them success means recognition and praise by men and women, they were not concern about approval from God, they used religious to attract attention, not to glorify God. Because they thought that position is a sign of greatness, they chose the best seat in the synagogue and at the public dinner. Albert Einstein wrote, try not to become a man or woman of success, but rather try to become a person of value.

In a nutshell, only leadership by example can be fruitful: like Jesus, we must be a sacrificial Lamb for others to live. We must be committed in our Christian journey, and like saint Paul, we should show love and give ourselves for the sake of the gospel and let not our attitude be a burden to others. Like the Thessalonians, let us always accept the word of God and put it into use.

Peace,

Fr. JINGBE Simon