

Homily for 31st Sunday

Today's readings are a lesson in good leadership. Malachi in the first reading condemns those in authority who, betray those in their care by lack of integrity and sincerity. Such people do more harm than good. Malachi says: "The lips of the priest are to keep knowledge, and instruction is to be sought from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" . When priests do not properly exercise their God-given ministry of teaching, they cause "many to falter" by their instruction . Then the Lord, in order to protect His people, tries to correct His priests by turning their blessings into curses and by making the priests contemptible and base before all the people. If you are a baptized Christian, you are a priest (1 Pt 2:9; Rv 5:10; Catechism, 783, 1241, 1546). Therefore, the words of God through Malachi apply to you. St. Thomas Aquinas taught: "To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer" (quoted in Catechism, 904).

In the Psalm, the Psalmist compares God to a mother, and he compares himself to a weaned child at peace on its mother's lap. This is a striking image, and worth reflecting on. How can a child who is being weaned and is also on his mother's lap understand the suffering of the weaning? What he wants is right there; there is nothing bad about his having it—it costs his mother nothing to satisfy him; the pain of doing without it is sharp and urgent. And so for a while the child will be overwhelmed by the misery of his situation. But sooner or later in his affliction he will also see his mother, and that makes all the difference. His desire for what she will not give him is still urgent, and the pain of the deprivation remains sharp. But in seeing her, he feels her love of him. He senses her goodness, and he comes to trust her. As Isaiah puts it, he sucks consolation to the full in another way (Is 66:11). And that is how he can be both weaned and also resting peacefully by her side. What are we teaching others by our conversation and way of living?

A DEA officer stopped at a ranch in America , and talked with an old rancher. He told the rancher, "I need to inspect your ranch for illegally grown drugs." The rancher said, "Okay , but don't go in that field over there.....", as he pointed out the location. The DEA officer verbally exploded saying, " Mister, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me!" showing the badge he said: "See this badge?! This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish...On any land! No questions asked or answers given!! Have I made myself clear...do you understand?!" The rancher nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores. A short time later, the old rancher heard loud screams, looked up, and saw the DEA officer running for his life, being chased by the rancher's big bull. With every step the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he'd sure enough get gored before he reached safety. The officer was clearly terrified. The rancher threw down his tools, ran to the fence and yelled at the top of his lungs..."Your badge, show him your BADGE!!"

We are accustomed to a certain judgmental attitude in viewing others and their actions. Who we are do not bother God but our behaviour matters a lot. God takes into account our dealings with others. Cardinal Newman prayed: "Let me preach You without preaching, not by words, but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You". All our wisdom and knowledge should help others to give glory to God. They are meant to teach us true spiritual human character. They are meant for self-transformation. They are meant to transform anxiety into peace, arrogance into humility, envy into compassion, to awaken the pure soul in man and his love for the Source, which is God. When pride takes hold of us we try to control others by imposing our ideas, become arrogant, rude and restless. "When pride comes then comes disgrace but with humility comes wisdom," says proverbs. At some points in life we ignore wisdom and thirst for honour. Because we are threatened by inferiority complex. It creates problems in the family, in the parish and in the society. Let us remember that "True humility is intelligent self-respect which keeps us from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves. It makes us modest by reminding us how far we have come short of what we can be." Let us be good servants not proud leaders.