



Wednesday 13th October 2021

Wednesday of the twenty-eighth week in Ordinary Time Year 1

Gospel

Lk 11:42-46

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Alas for you Pharisees – and you lawyers, woe to you!

The Lord said to the Pharisees: 'Alas for you Pharisees! You who pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and overlook justice and the love of God! These you should have practised, without leaving the others undone. Alas for you Pharisees who like taking the seats of honour in the synagogues and being greeted obsequiously in the market squares! Alas for you, because you are like the unmarked tombs that men walk on without knowing it!'

A lawyer then spoke up. 'Master,' he said 'when you speak like this you insult us too.' 'Alas for you lawyers also,' he replies, 'because you load on men burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift.'

Reflection by Fr Graham Fullick

The thing about Pharisees and lawyers (teachers of the *Torah* Law) here (and also the scribes elsewhere), is that we can project the bad things we see in us onto *them*. *They* are the bad guys. And we are pure, because what we see that is bad in us has been scapegoated onto them. We have projected our guilt onto them to give us self-satisfaction, self-righteousness that we are not like them. Of course we are! Our fallen nature always avoids self-judgement for in God's light we see light and we are afraid of what light may uncover. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Jesus came to save humanity. We are humanity.

Where religion has been equated or *can* be equated with hypocrisy or tying up burdens, then it is comfortable to say "I am spiritual but not religious, Father" or "I'm a good person, I just don't go to Mass" or "God knows I'm a

good person, I just don't need to go to church to prove it to others" or "I talk to Jesus directly, I don't need an institution in the middle" or, if someone really wants to rub it in, "I'm a good Catholic, but I don't have to go and sit with the hypocrites." This is an exchange of one perceived form of smugness, judgmental self-righteousness, for another form of smugness, judgmental sneering and derision. There is no "rightful" or "justified indignation" before God. Calling another person a hypocrite when we are faced with our own inadequacy is never a valid argument for not engaging in change. If a murderer says his accuser is a murderer too, and it is the case, then two wrongs do not make the first one aright with God, nor the second one. If a politician is caught with his snout in the trough and their response is to call out the other as a "hypocrite" for also having their snout in the trough then it is no defence before God. Both are in the wrong.

And that is the point. In both the murderer example and the politician example all have sinned. We all fall down before God. It is not our neighbour's judgment that we should fear as we judge ourselves more worthy than they are. First of all, God knows everything about us in His Omniscience. God knows and comprehends everything we do not see, and still more God sees what we do not want to see in ourselves and what we do not want to see in the benefit of the doubt to others. God's magnanimity is Mercy and Grace which meet in Jesus. If we, like the Pharisee or teacher of the law, point the finger as plaintiff at our neighbour naming them as defendant then we forget the point here. Before God we are all defendants: Jews, Greeks gentiles. We cannot choose ourselves before God. God is our judge. We are to live our life knowing that God is our holy and righteous judge. His name is hallowed (holy). His Kingdom is to come. We are to forgive our neighbour as God has forgiven us. That means we all need Mercy in front of God's judgment. Only the Lord's judgment matters, so we should not concern or pre-occupy ourselves about judging others or others' judgment of us. The greatness of God is that He came to save us, even while we were, all of us sinners.

We come to Mass precisely because we know we need God's mercy. All who come to Mass should do so because we acknowledge our sinfulness and need for change. "There but for the grace of God go I." The first act of the Mass is the Penitential Rite! The sacramental Rite of Penance (Reconciliation) is or should be part of our Saturday, or any day, preparation for Mass and more than that, preparation for the next week with a spiritual top-up of grace for more inclination to virtue. Holy Communion as Pope Francis has said (and others before him) is not a reward for the righteous saved, but food for the seeking

soul. When Jesus says that He is the Vine and we are the branches, He also says in the same verse “Apart from me you can do nothing”. (Jn 15:5)

Yes, we are entitled to judge and should judge but only as discernment in seeking good and avoiding evil. What separates us from animals is that God has given us a soul, a gifted participation in the Divine life from our inception. The soul has an intellect called the conscience where we learn good and bad, right from wrong. In that place, we are to work out our salvation before God with fear and trembling. (Philp 2:12) If we condemn others and disdain them however, we fail to help each other in our mutual goal of salvation before God. Every parent seeks that their child knows good from bad and lives in virtue not vice. Jesus chose Apostles and founded a Church based on St. Peter with a mission of salvation. That is a moral mission for the conversion of the world. Morality is not found in externals, unless the externals are immoral in themselves. Morality is in the soul, on the inside of the cup, bowl or dish, the *human vessel* who we are. We are to let the Holy Spirit of Father and Son, the Triune God convict us and become people of right conviction. Final judgment is the Lord’s.

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