

**Homily: 31st Sunday of the Year (A)**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Malachi 1:14-1:2, 8-10**

**Psalm 131:1-3**

**1 Thessalonians 1:5-10**

**Matthew 23:1-12**

## *Each of us is to walk humbly before our God.*

Every once in a while, the print media runs a story about some televangelist or well-known public religious figure who gets outed because of some scandal involving personal relationships or sordid financial dealings.

It is always painful for priests and ministers to hear about these personal failings. I say to myself, "There but for the grace of God go I."

There is not a wealth of good news in today's Gospel. The poor Pharisees are once again the targets of the righteous wrath of Jesus. Jesus is depicted as strongly denouncing the scribes and Pharisees. There is little doubt that in Jesus' own lifetime, he was involved in various conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees. However, most scholars contend that these conflicts were never as serious as those presented in this passage. What is reflected in this passage is the growing tension between Jews and Christians experienced in Saint Matthew's community. This means that the portrait of the Pharisees given here is not an objective one, nor does the very negative attitude expressed toward them reflect the actual position of the historical Jesus. Matthew is applying his understanding of Jesus'

teaching to new and complex issues. We are to do the same thing today.

There is something disconcerting about people who have been entrusted with breaking open the Word of God for the people, yet not living up to it themselves. We might be reminded of the old saying of some parents who tell their children, "Do as I say, not as I do" or, "Yours is not to reason why, yours is but to do or die!"

The words of Jesus do not apply to ministers only. They set up a goal toward which all believers can strive. It's a difficult task always to "walk the talk." We humans are complex and live with a daily mixture of emotions, values, stresses and temptations. I dare say that none of us has a perfect – or even a nearly perfect – track record of being faithful to doing everything the right way. As far as honors and titles go, there's even an impulse to want to rest on our laurels, basking in the respect and honor that goes with status in society. Ultimately, they mean nothing from the perspective of eternity. There's something infinitely attractive about the person who chooses to humble himself or herself even though, by worldly standards, they might deserve the accolades of others. When we're tempted to bask in the limelight of titles like "Father," "Pastor," "Bishop," "Professor" or "Doctor," that is a good time to reflect on

the fact that we're all equal in the sight of God...and this same God will not judge us on the titles we've earned (or not earned!), but on how faithful we've been to our calling in life.

God does not ask us to be right or to excel all the time or to be perfect in our responses to grace. God asks us to be faithful. Isn't that what he's asking the Pharisees to be? Though many centuries separate us from the encounters of Jesus with the religious leaders of his time, his words cast a wide net of challenge to all of us.

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before our God.