

Year A 31th Sunday Ordinary Time
Mal 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10; Ps 131:1, 2, 3; 1 Thes 2:7b-9, 13; Mt 23:9b, 10b

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This Sunday the Church presents us with readings that have to do with abuse of ecclesial authority, and hypocrisy. The Church is not afraid of the Word of God, which is cutting and penetrates to the marrow, revealing things hidden in the heart, laying it all out in the open (Heb 4:12-13), for there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed (Jesus said this, Mt 10:26/Lk 12:2). The Church, including its hierarchy, must be in a continual process of purification and conversion, as the recent past has only too painfully made clear. And it is in fact lack of transparency and the practice of denial which gives rise to the greater suspicion and unraveling of human attempts to evade the judgment of God, which is meant for our good and conversion, not for purposes of destruction (as enemies of the Church might intend).

See how the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, scolds the priests and threatens a curse upon them for making people stumble by how they teach (or perhaps live) God's Law, the Torah. The priests are said to have lost their way and become contemptible and base before all the people, because they did not keep God's ways, and have been partial in their decisions. They are called to listen and to conversion.

The psalm is a humble prayer of one who knows who he is, who is like a child, not trying to reach up too high into things too lofty for him. He is at peace, like a babe at his mother's breast. The reading from Paul is in the same vein: Paul has been like a wet-nurse, gentle, affectionate, sharing everything with his congregation, working very hard night and day to not be a burden. Jesus in Mk 10:42, when his disciples were arguing about who was more important, had said that it is the pagans who "lord it over" (oppress) their subjects; 1 Pt 5:3-4 uses the same word but applies it to the "clergy": they should lead by example and not "lord over it," but remember that there is one "arch-shepherd," Jesus, who died for us as the Servant (1 Pt 2:21-25).

Matthew's Gospel is not meant to have us project misdeeds onto the Pharisees and feel good about it; we should apply it to ourselves, when we demand much from others but give little of ourselves. It is by being humble that we shall be exalted.