

Homily of Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A, 2023

Malachi 1:14-2:2, 8-10; Psalm 131:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13; Matthew 23:1-12

A major duty of priests is to proclaim God's commandments and explain it to the flock. Today, every priest is invited to self-examen. In the first reading, God says through Prophet Malachi, "And now, O priests, this commandment is for you" (Malachi 2:1). "You have turned aside from the way, and have caused many to falter by your instruction" (Malachi 2:8). The message continues, "I, therefore, have made you contemptible and base before all the people, since you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your decisions" (Malachi 2:9). And a warning, "If you do not listen, if you do not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name, ... I will send a curse upon you and of your blessings I will make a curse" (Malachi 2:2).

Why is God furious with priests, and why are people contemptible with priests? I think, it is because as Jesus states, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Luke 12:48). St. Paul reminds priests, "Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1 Corinthians 1:26). Priests are mere earthen vessels holding God's treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7). Therefore, no priests has anything to boast about himself!

"Every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Hebrews 5:1). Priests are men of God, mediators between God and human beings, and dispensers of God's mysteries (1 Corinthians 4:1). Due to priests' sacred position, men and women entrust their lives to them.

Priests' sacred responsibilities are the "much" and the "more" entrusted to them. Therefore, when they turn aside from what God and human beings have entrusted to them and turn to "mammon," God becomes furious, and human beings become contemptible. For this reason, St. Paul advises priests, "to live in a manner worthy of the call [they] have received" (Ephesians 4:1).

It is important to always pray for priests. As spiritual fathers and leaders, whatever priests do, in one way or another, has an effect on the faithful, either positively or negatively. We see the rebuke in the first reading, "You have turned aside from the way, and have caused many to falter by your instruction" (Malachi 2:8). While priests' sin has a defiling effect on the people (Leviticus 4:3), priests' righteousness makes the faithful shout for joy (Psalm 132:9).

Pray for priests not to be hypocrites like the scribes and the Pharisees Jesus rebuked in today's gospel. "For they preach, but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. ... They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi'" (Matthew 23:3-7).

Due to priests' spiritual responsibilities, Satan incessantly wages war on them from various fronts to wound the Body of Christ. Pray for priests as Jesus prayed for his apostles when Satan desired to sift them like wheat (Luke 22:31-32), that priests' faith may not fail and that they may continue to strengthen the flock.

Pray for the fulfilment of God's promise through Prophet Jeremiah, "I will appoint for you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently" (Jeremiah 3:15).

We thank God who uses priests as mediators between himself and human beings and uses them to dispense his mysteries despite priests' weaknesses and sins. Priests are "wounded healers." Indeed, as St. Paul writes, "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Romans 5:20). In priests, God's power is made manifest in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Thanks be to God for the faithful flock who looks upon Jesus whom priests represent and not upon the weaknesses and sins of priests.

Let us pray:

*Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.
Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments.*

*Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.
Set their souls on fire with love for your people.*

*Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the
footsteps of Jesus.
Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom.*

*Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.
Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.*

Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.

- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Prayer for Priest

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