

Homily
31st Sunday in OT
November 5, 2023

One of my favorite speakers, Zig Ziglar, related a story about when he invited a new friend to come to church with him. The new friend declined, saying that he would not be interested since churches were full of nothing but hypocrites, to which Zig said, "Not to worry; there's always room for one more." Today's Gospel message is all about hypocrisy, how Jesus says that since the scribes and Pharisees have taken the chair of Moses, we should, "do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example." Their hypocrisy is an example we may be able to use to learn a lot more about ourselves. This is something I sadly know too much about. So in preparing this homily, I looked up the definition of hypocrisy and saw a picture of myself.

Hypocrisy is the practice of claiming to have a moral standard or belief to which one's own behavior does not conform. What is hypocrisy in simple words? A situation in which I pretend to believe something that I do not really believe, or that is the opposite of what I do or say: One rule for me and another rule for thee. And many times, I don't even realize that I'm doing it.

I try to practice consistent behavior. I try to recognize good behavior in others and not judge against my own perceived good behavior. I try to uphold others in the same Christian dignity that I uphold in myself. I try to practice what I preach.

And in the first reading, we are confronted with the reality that there is only one god, and I'm not Him. Only God is King. And we who have failed Him will be cursed. Isn't that true in our own lives? When we don't follow God's law, the High Law, we fall to a lower law. It's like walking down an icy sidewalk; if we do not take great care, if we do not obey the higher law of avoiding icy sidewalks, we will inevitably obey the lower law of gravity as we fall on our ... backsides. And we will fall to a worse law, if we lead others down the wrong path when we don't obey God's law, when we don't practice what we preach. This is certainly a precursor to Jesus giving us the Greatest Commandment, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Admiral Chester William Nimitz, a fleet admiral in the US Navy during WWII and General Douglas MacArthur of the US Army, went fishing together. In a sudden squall, the boat capsized, and the eminent fighting men floundered helplessly in the water. When they finally reached the boat, the Admiral cautioned, "Now, Mac, don't mention this to anyone. I'd be disgraced if the men of the Navy learned I can't swim." "Don't worry," General MacArthur replied. "I'd hate to have my men find out I can't walk on water."

When we are not honest with ourselves, or when we try to present an image of ourselves that isn't completely true, we are being hypocritical, we are hurting ourselves and those we love. We are violating the greater law, The Greatest Commandment. And then we become subject to the lower laws, those laws that humble us, bring us down, and sometimes bring us down hard.

What happens when we are caught being hypocritical? I don't like it; it's embarrassing, humiliating, it destroys relationships.

What happens when we don't practice what we preach? I get called to task; I have to fess up to my failings, make reparations, seek forgiveness.

When I realize that I am being hypocritical, I feel guilty and ashamed, because this is not a Christian approach or pursuit. When I judge the splinter in someone else's eye, I forget about the beam in my own. When I lie to myself, I miss out on opportunities to grow and instead shrink and fall. "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

St. Paul gives us a great example in today's second reading, "With such affection for you, we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us." This is the Second Greatest Commandment in action. When we are hypocritical, we rob our neighbor and ourselves of the opportunity to grow. When we put God first, we act and say and think in ways that are in alignment with God.

We do this by first recognizing the God of the Universe, Who is proclaimed in Word, Who becomes present in Sacrament and Who loves us perfectly. We then give thanks to God unceasingly, always relying on Him Who is our strength and our nourishment. And finally, we share that Love, the perfect Love of our Triune God, with our neighbor; not by judging, not by hypocrisy, but by loving others as we love ourselves. And we bring as many with us as possible, by what we say, what we do and even how we smile. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

When we obey the higher laws, we are happier, more productive, enjoy healthier relationships and, most importantly of all, store up treasures in heaven.