

Call No Man “Father” (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Malachi 1:14-2:2, 8-10—Prophecy against Corrupt Priests

1. Old Covenant “Priests”: Malachi’s prophecy is against them (2:1)
2. Morally Corrupt: “you have turned aside from the way” (2:8)
3. False Teaching: “you caused many to stumble by your instruction (*torah*)” (2:8)
4. Fatherhood of God: “Have we not all *one father*?” the “one God”? (2:10)

Psalm 131—A Psalm of Humility

1. Humility: “O Lord, my heart is not *lifted up*... My eyes are not *raised too high*” (v. 1)

1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13—Paul’s Ministry Like a “Mother” with Her “Children”

1. Conversion: they “turned” from “idols” to serve “a living and true God” (1:9)

Matthew 23:1-12—Whoever Exalts Himself Will Be Humbled

1. Scribes and Pharisees: context of Jesus’ words (23:1-4)
 - a. Authority: “Sit on Moses’ seat (Greek *kathedra*); power to “bind” (cf. Matt 16)
 - b. Submission: “practice and observe whatever they tell you”
 - c. Hypocrisy: “but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice”
2. Desire for Praise: “they do all their deeds *to be seen* by men” (23:5)
 - a. Phylacteries: leather prayer band/box containing Jewish Scriptures, *Shema* (Hebrew *tephillin*; see Deut 6:8; 11:18; Exod 13:9, 16)
 - b. Fringes: tassels worn on the four corners of the garment; reminder of 10 C’s (Hebrew *tzi-tzith*; see Num 15:38f; Deut 22:12; cf. Jesus in Matt 9:20)
 - c. Synagogues and Feasts: “places of honor” and “best seats”
 - d. Titles: “salutations in the market place, being called ‘rabbi’ by men” (Hebrew *Rabbi*, means “My Teacher,” literally “My Great One”)
3. Jesus Disciples: are not to be like the Scribes and Pharisees
 - a. Not “Rabbi” (Greek *rabbi*) for you have “one Teacher” (Greek)
 - b. Not “Father” (Greek *pater*) on earth,” for you have “one Father”
 - c. Not “Master” (Greek *kathēgētes*; Latin *magister*), for “you have one Master...”
 - d. Greatest → “Servant” (Greek *diakonos*)
 - e. Point: “*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled...*”
4. Did Jesus Absolutely Prohibit the use of “Father” (Greek *pater*)? (Matt 23:9)
 - a. Jesus often uses hyperbole=exaggeration to make a point (cf. Matt 5:28-30)
 - a. St. Stephen: “My brothers and *fathers*... our father Abraham” (Acts 7:2)
 - b. St. Paul: calls himself “*father*” (1 Cor 4:15-16)
 - c. St. John: “I am writing to you, *fathers*” (1 John 2:13, 14; 2X!)

St. John Chrysostom

“Call no man your father.” This is said in order that they may know whom they out to call

Father in the highest sense. *It is not said frivolously as if no one should ever be called father.* Just as the human master is not the divine Master, so neither is the father the Father who is the cause of all, both of all masters and all fathers. (John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 72.3; trans. in M. Simonetti, p. 167)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. What do you think of Malachi’s prophecy against the corrupt Old Testament priesthood? Why do you think this passage was chosen as the Old Testament reading for this Sunday?

2. What are some practical ways against the spiritual pride and desire for praise that Jesus warns the Scribes and Pharisees about?

3. Have you ever wondered why Catholics call priests “father” when Jesus taught his disciples to “call no man” their “father on earth” (Matt 23:9)? How would you explain this to a non-Catholic? What do you make of Jesus’ similar teaching to call no one “Master” or “teacher”? (cf. ‘Mister’ and ‘Doctor’)

For Further Study

1. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 290-93: an excellent discussion of the context of Jesus’ teaching his disciples not to call anyone “father.”
2. Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 167. Excellent collection of patristic comments on Matthew’s Gospel.