

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the time of Jesus' ministry, and Matthew's telling, there was a marked adherence to the Law. Pharisees wore Phylacteries, small boxes worn on the forehead and forearm. Enclosed in the box was a parchment with Scripture inscribed. The heavy yoke of law was visible and worn as a medal. They also wore long tassels, which signified that the wearer was pious and set apart, a sign of prestige and status in the religious community.

Though Jesus tells the Apostles and disciples to honor their religious leaders, he qualifies with the warning not to emulate their conduct. He denounced the Pharisees as blind guides, not practicing what they preached. With outward displays of devotion, their hearts were not in alignment with their expressions. Claiming the authority of the Law of Moses, with all its power and lineage, and with miniscule attention to laws and purification practices for every situation, God and neighbor were not the first of priorities for the Pharisees. The law reigned. Leaders were idolized.

## A Gospel Word for the Home

### Matthew 23:1-12

Titles of honor with seats of power encouraged admiration from peers, and favor from God. This took the focus from love, mercy, and justice, and centered it on tradition. Political correctness excluded rather than *included* people into the religious community. The elite were honored and the ordinary ignored. Authority and power were visible. Jesus forbids this show of superiority and pride. He renounces status and teaches status reversal. The exalted will be humbled, and the humbled will be exalted. It is God's praise we should desire, not the praise from our peers. He named seven woes. Each begins with "woe to the..." and they elicit horror of sin, and promise punishment to those who commit it.

The "holier than thou" attitude is not compatible with Jesus' teachings. Neither is pomp and circumstance. Wearing a crucifix, a cross, or other symbol of devotion, does not guarantee piety or obedience. They should be worn with reverence and with a clean heart filled with love. In fact, the tassels and Phylacteries worn by the hypocritical Pharisees were an offense to those who did obey the law. Representing themselves as better than they actually were blocked followers from the truth and from their path to the Kingdom of God. Humility and service, akin to love and mercy, are the preferred qualities of residents of the Kingdom of God.

## Parent Survival

So to avoid the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, look to your conduct. Children watch the adults in their lives and unconsciously follow by example. Be aware that your outward display must match the inner workings of your heart. Your motivation should be rooted in loving the Lord with all your heart and in loving your neighbor as yourself. Spending all your time checking the details of the law, and inevitably judging others, will cause you to be counterfeit. Love is the solution. Law is not a burden to be carried and deliberated. Law is fulfilled with love.

## Car or Meal Talk

Ask your family to name the Greatest Commandment and the Second Greatest Commandment. Which is harder to keep? How is keeping the Greatest and Second Greatest Commandments a way to fulfill all the laws?

## One-Line Prayer

Jesus, teach us to love without bounds so that we might fulfill your Law. Amen.