

Daily Reflections



Center for Spiritual Development

JESUS REACTS TO A DOUBLE STANDARD

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's Gospel

The Lord said: "Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb, but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God. These you should have done, without overlooking the others."

Woe to you Pharisees! You love the seat of honor in synagogues and greetings in marketplaces. Woe to you! You are like unseen graves over which people unknowingly walk."

Then one of the scholars of the law said to him in reply, "Teacher, by saying this you are insulting us too." And he said, "Woe also to you scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them."

LUKE 11:42-46

Reflection

Today's Gospel selection is part of Luke's Travel Narrative: Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27). Jesus is teaching the disciples the core of his mission. Jesus' chosen disciples are in the process of learning the following: to offer no retaliation when offended by another; the cost of discipleship; the disciple's prayer. Today's passage connects the Jewish tithing custom that *almsgiving makes one clean before God*. In Jesus' time there were some Pharisees who were good and faithful, but others were hypocrites and self-righteous religious leaders. In the first of the "Woes" above, Jesus is saying, *You Pharisees follow the Law by giving a tenth of each little herb in your garden, which you should do without ignoring the more important instructions, such as treating others equally and walking in the love of God!*

In the second "Woe" Jesus says, *You Pharisees love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and be greeted in the marketplaces. You are like unmarked burial grounds that people are walking over without even noticing!* The third "Woe" is for the scholars of the Law who were also feeling insulted by Jesus' accusations. Jesus did not restrain himself: *You scholars of the Law, you put heavy spiritual loads on the backs of others, too much for them to carry, and will not even lift a finger to help them!* As Jesus teaches the disciples, he is not objecting to the pharisaic lifestyle; he is highlighting the more important commands of the Law that are being neglected. The disciples need to see this hidden negligence so they will follow the whole of God's Law: caring for the lowly and downtrodden, the stranger and the widow, the lame and the humble ones. Jesus is not trying to seek honor, fame and glory for himself – this belongs to God alone. His attention is on those who are neglected and in need of compassion. His disciples are to follow Jesus' manner of servant leadership.



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For Pondering

As I was pondering this passage from Luke where Jesus is teaching the disciples to avoid the hypocrisy and self-righteousness they observe in religious leaders, I wondered how Jesus might address people who are in powerful positions in this present time. Consider with me:

“Woe to you who disregard and destroy Mother Earth and her creatures, her children, the sacred land!”

“Woe to you who build nuclear weapons that can wipe out peoples and nations rather than find ways to negotiate and make peace!”

“Woe to you who wage war on innocent people, making them homeless refugees wandering among the ruins!”

I can imagine Jesus standing before us weeping, trying to get us to wake up to the violence and tragedy we humans promote, affecting the “dear neighbor.”

For Prayer

Let us listen and respond to the invitation of Jesus to come to him:

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

MATTHEW 11:28-30

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