

Tuesday 7th March, 2023.

2nd Week of Lent – Cycle ‘A’

1st Reading = Isaiah 1:10,16-20,27-28;31

Resp. Psalm = Ps 50:8-9,16-17,21;23

Gospel = Matthew 23:1-12

We must have heard the saying ‘Do as I say, not as I do’. Jesus deals with this in today’s Gospel and charges the Pharisees with this attitude. Although Jesus generalised these attitudes of theirs, it would be unfair for us to think that all Pharisees and Scribes acted in the manner He condemned. Not every Pharisee accentuated his dress or climbed the social ladder or strutted his ego in public for effect, only to bask in the glory of his title (23:7-8). It was true that the Pharisees and scribes were experts in the Law and their rulings carried weight and could even influence very serious matters of Jewish life, and even among the Jewish Christians; after all, as Jesus said, they sat in the "seat of Moses," which was not only the leader's physical chair found at the head of the congregation in the synagogue, but also that they held positions of strong influence in terms of teaching and interpretation and guidance in the life of the Jewish nation. When we think that there was a connection between the sociopolitical life of the people and their cultural heritage, it makes it easier for us to understand why they had such an influence. But, Jesus' critique ran deeper than words contradicted by actions. He wanted his community to be marked by humility. No one should seek ambition for its own sake, but be willing to serve. Titles like "Teacher" or "Father" (not only a title denoting family ties, but a recognition of social prominence) or "Sir" ("Lord" in the polite sense) were just some of Jesus’ worries. So, leadership gave them substance and they took negative advantage of them. For Jesus, leadership was rooted in service (humility) and example. Do as I say, because I can and am willing to do it, and not because it concerns you.

In a commentary made by a panellist on a TV program about the attitude of ministers and abused privileges, he decried the way they threw laws at citizens without caring how they felt. They had been talking specifically about ‘Education’ as a means to elevate the standards of the country’s economy. He remarked that the system of education is under attack and things are going from bad to worse because those who are at the helm of affairs are self-centred. He further suggested that if all ministers have their kids registered in schools in the country, the decisions would change, for it seemed they were unconcerned because their

children were not touched by it. Yet, they have been given every resource to make education better, so that even the poorest of the poor can have access to education. The same could be said of leaders in other political and economic sectors of every nation. It is equally a challenge to the leadership of the Church. It is easy to dish out commands, but it takes great humility to stoop low to join others in executing it. This is why Jesus warns us today through the Gospel: “they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them” (Matthew 23:4). But these are the people who sit on Moses' seat. The Scribes, who for the most part sided with the Pharisees, had the function of educating the people in the Law of Moses; that is why they were said to “sit on Moses' seat”. Jesus warns his disciples, and He's really talking to you and I today, to be sure to distinguish the Law as read out and taught in the Synagogues from the practical interpretations of the Law to be seen in their leaders' lifestyles. We have experienced so many moments of toil and struggle in our lives, communities and countries. But we also realise that during the time that things were going on, and even after, the influential people who should have, at least, said something, we found to be very quiet and silent, as though they were on a different planet. We have all been involved in issues similar to this, including my humble self. The season of Lent offers us this challenge to be of help, speak when we must and be silent when we should, educate when the occasion arises and let the spirit of God lead us all. May St Perpetua, St Felicity and the Martyrs of Carthage intercede for us, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

A Fruitful Lenten Season.

Fr Kevin. N. Lereh, m.ss.cc

Together in prayer.