

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

What the Torah Is All About Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday,
August 23, 2014 8:15 AM Ez 43:1-7ab; **Mt 23:1-12** (St. Rose of Lima, virgin; BVM)
(What are you doing in life? It should be serving your heavenly Father.)

Today we continue the critique of the Torah, and here the teachers of the Torah. Jesus is not terribly delicate. He is not pulling punches here. Now whom is he addressing? The crowds and his disciples. **He is not addressing the Pharisees, the rabbis, the scribes. He is not addressing them, but he is talking about them to the crowds and to his disciples.**

In general, **his whole attitude about Torah is that it has become exaggerated in its importance.** This has **many consequences.** The number of commandments and/or interpretations become **wildly multiplied**, for one thing. For another, the focus is—because it's a matter of comportment, behavior, it becomes inordinately **focused on the externals, not the internals**, the outside of the cup, not the inside of the cup. That's another problem. Here it **inflates the value of the rabbinate itself.** And you know what happens with inflation. When the currency inflates it becomes **less valuable.** So when the Torah inflates it becomes less valuable. In the Catholic Church some years ago when I grew up, the idea of mortal sin had become inflated. It became so dominant; there were so many mortal sins that the whole idea became almost worthless, cheapened. That's what is happening to the Torah at the time of Jesus. Its value has become cheapened. Yesterday he tried to refocus. What's it really about? Love: love of God and love of neighbor.

Now he is talking about the teachers. Oh, they are important he says. "They have taken the seat of Moses." Better listen to them. You can't have a religion without some kind of authority. He is not against the whole idea of authority. He is not an anarchist. But on the other hand, he doesn't really respect what he sees because **the value of the teachers has become inflated with the value of the Torah.** And so they themselves have an inflated idea

of who they are and what they are worth. **They think they are really important and they act like it** and they expect everyone else to act like it. But he says, “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.” He doesn’t buy it.

Now we have to be very careful that in our own view of who we are, we understand where we come from. “Call no one father.” That means, yes, you have a father, but that is not particularly important. Here Abraham was meant. “Abraham is our father.” That was like a bragging right. “We are Abraham’s children. We are the special guys. We are more important than all these other pathetic people. Well, no, “You have only one Father, and that same Father is the Father of everyone.” In that sense there is no one special. Or you could say **everyone is special**, but not just one group. If that is your religious identity, it’s a poor one. **If your identity is the role you play** in the Church or the role you play in your family or the role you play in society, **it’s a poor identity**. That’s not who you are. **That’s just something you are doing, hopefully for God**, but it’s just something you are doing. It’s your job. It’s not who you are. **Who are you? You are a child of the heavenly Father**. And that’s how you should think about yourself. **And what are you doing in life? It should be serving your heavenly Father**. It should be finding more about your heavenly Father and bringing his love into the world, because that’s what the Torah is all about.