

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Hypercriticism Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Monday, August 25, 2014
8:15 AM 1 Thes 1:1-5, 11-12; **Mt 23:13-22** (St. Louis of France; St. Joseph of Calasanz, priest) (A tendency that people have: look at it in yourself.)

So today we continue **Jesus' critique of the establishment of his day**, the religious orthodoxy, if you want to call it that, of his day. He is criticizing **the way in which the Torah is being interpreted and applied.**

This particular section, and it is actually only one of many sections of Jesus' criticism of the understanding that prevailed at that time of the Torah and the way it was applied, but **this particular section is based upon distinctions that are worthless.** The word "hypocrite" is used here. Now often the word "hypocrite" in Greek means "actor," but here that doesn't fit, but rather another meaning. "Hypocrite" in Greek also can mean to "overanalyze," to be hypercritical, the same word, hypercritic. So here there is an **over analysis of all kinds of details, none of which really matter.**

Jesus has already made it clear that everything depends upon the law: "Love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself." The whole Law depends on that. Well, **this has absolutely nothing to do with love so, therefore, is irrelevant.**

We could end there, except we have to realize that the tendency that was exercised by the rabbis at that time is **a tendency that people have.** We just have this tendency, some more than others—some more than others. It's a little corner of the human psyche and it's one that **tends to affect those people who are able to be leaders, in particular.** It goes along with certain other abilities that are often found in leaders, and **it undermines their leadership ability.** This is about qualities that undermine the capacity of certain people to lead others, teach others, pastor others, govern others, legislate for others. So it's very relevant. It's

relevant to our government. It's relevant to our Church. It's relevant to our clubs, societies, organizations. **It's relevant to wherever human beings get together and organize themselves because this tendency of hypercriticism, of over analysis, can ruin what is initially something very goodwilled, something well-meaning.**

But as Augustine pointed out, being well-meaning is not really enough. **We have to go beyond just being well-meaning. We have to really do a good job.** As Jesus is pointing out, there is no good job being done here. And by instruction, by the very teaching and guidance of the guides necessarily a bad job is being done.

But notice, Jesus is not actually addressing the scribes and Pharisees. That's what's most peculiar. He is addressing the crowds and his disciples. Why? Because **the crowds and his disciples have the same tendencies.** That's why we have to be wary about this. It's not something we can dismiss: oh, well, that was back then and that was those people. Oh no, **look at it in yourself.**