

Legalisms Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Monday, August 22, 2016 8:15 AM
2 Thes 1:1-5, 11-12; **Mt 23:13-22** The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Jesus is calling the crowds and his disciples to a certain authentic and personal response to God.)

“Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.’”

It’s always important to note to whom is Jesus speaking. Sometimes it’s just the disciples. Sometimes it’s just the crowd. Sometimes it’s the Pharisees or the Sadducees or the chief priests or the elders. Here it says, “Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,” but then he says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees.” In other words, he is saying, yes, among you disciples there are scribes and Pharisees. In other words, he is not actually talking to the group that are actually scribes, but rather to the **scribal types among his own followers and the scribal types in the crowd among ordinary folks.**

This is very important that we know note this. In other words, what he is getting at is a tendency that some of the scribes were noted for, a **legalism**. But he is saying, well, you know what, that’s all over; **all kinds of people are doing this, practicing legalisms**, making stupid distinctions that are irrelevant to God, because God is not a legalist and God doesn’t split hairs. So if you are **splitting hairs**, and it is a human tendency in many people, if not in all, then you are doing something that is quite wrong, quite misled.

And furthermore he used the word guides. Now who are the guides? **The guides are the leaders**. So he is also talking about people who are leaders **in the Christian community**. So in what way do we tend to be like this? That’s the question. The word hypocrite, for example, it really means actor. **To what degree do we just put on faith and religion?** To what degree is it just a role we play as if we are in a play, as if we have memorized our lines and we know what’s expected of us and what we are supposed to say, **but it isn’t really coming from within our**

spirit. Is that not part of what is called **cultural religion**: that people belong to a group, speak the language of that group, **fit into that group, but really aren't in touch with the God within them?** That would be related to being a hypocrite. In modern English of course hypocrite usually refers to something very blatant, a blatant sort of inner contradiction. But this is not necessarily the case here. It could be an almost unconscious playing along, going along, but not really being in touch with the divine within us and thereby **being happy with all kinds of moral duplicity.** If you do this, it's wrong; if you do that, it's okay. You've heard it; you may have said it.

Jesus is calling the crowds and his disciples to a certain authentic and personal response to God. And this means that we have to be serious about our own need for salvation. When we gather for Mass we acknowledge our sinfulness. That's so that we **recognize our need for mercy,** and that's the right way to begin to worship God, to recognize our need for mercy. But in all honesty there are people that only go through the words; they really don't recognize their need for mercy. They really don't recognize their sinfulness. They think they are just fine the way they are.

Now God accepts us the way we are, but the call to salvation, **the call to the kingdom of God is a call to godliness.** It is a calling forth of potential that God has placed within us that is not yet realized; and the coming forth of **that requires work,** including trying to understand the Bible, **trying to understand the word of God.** That's work. And there are people that don't want to do that work. They don't really want to bother. They want everything presented to them pre-digested like an Indian squaw chewing up the food for her little baby. But that's not what Christ is talking about. The call to the kingdom is a call to newness of life and it is a call to join with him in **working for God's will in the world and in ourselves.** And there's quite a bit that still needs to be done.