

The Gnat and the Camel Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday,
August 23, 2016 8:15 AM 2 Thes 2:1-3a, 14-17; **Mt 23:23-26** (St. Rose of Lima,
virgin) (“You should practice the important things of the law: judgment, mercy, fidelity.”)

Today’s reading is a continuation of yesterday’s, and I will recall to your mind that Jesus is addressing his disciples and the crowds. He is not merely talking to the leaders. So what he is talking about are **human foibles that can apply to everybody. Hypocrisy**, again, a matter of acting, playing roles, **not really acting out of internal, sincere conviction**, but doing and saying what one thinks one should say and do because one has been trained to do that or say that. So that’s one thing to keep in mind.

Now he has this wonderful statement: **“blind guides who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.”** Now I have seen that in many people, and it is not something deliberate; in a way they can’t help it. Sometimes people pay so much attention to a gnat in their lives, or in the life of someone else in their family for example, but they don’t see the camel that they are swallowing. For example, **they may point out imperfections in someone else.** This happens often in parishes. People come to me complaining about somebody else or about some procedure they see as not the very best possible or about something else where they just don’t think somebody else is doing the right thing, **all the while not seeing that they are being very judgmental.** Well, judgmentalism is a camel. If you swallow judgmentalism, than in what way are you following God?

God is not judgmental. That’s why he says here: **“You should practice the important things of the law: judgment, mercy, fidelity.”** Judgment is not judgmentalism. **Judgment means discerning what is truly good**, what is truly right, as opposed to what is bad and wrong—that you are supposed to do. **Mercy, you are supposed to be accepting of other people and even of one’s own weaknesses and failures**—and **fidelity, loyalty to God**, to what is really

important. But so often people focus on little things and ignore big things. This is actually a pattern that belongs to what is called scrupulosity. **Scrupulous people are often very concerned with gnats, but they don't see the big issues that they are avoiding.** So it's something to be aware of. We all can get caught up in this at some time or another.

Then he goes down to **cleansing the outside of the cup as opposed to the inside.** This is a particular problem of certain people that really don't see so much inside themselves. It's as if their consciousness or their awareness is fixated outside. They are always looking on the outside of everything. They present usually a very nice appearance. But Jesus says, look, you have to look inside. That's even more important, the appearance: not so important. It's not unimportant, but it's just not so important. **The inside is really important.**

- How are you really feeling?
- How are you really with God inside?
- How reconciled are you to all the people in your life that cause conflicts?
- How willing are you to bear the burdens that happen to be yours?
- How forgiving are you really inside yourself for those people who have betrayed you or let you down or hurt you either deliberately or indeliberately?

These are inner matters that are very important. If we are going to be holy, **we have to pay attention to them and deal with them.**