

Hypocrisy Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Monday, August 28, 2017 8:15 AM
1 Thes 1:1-5, 8b-10; **Mt 23:13-22** **St. Augustine**, bishop and Doctor of the Church
(To do a ritual in a meaningful way one has to be very conscious of what one is doing.)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites.”

Now it’s very interesting that Matthew begins this tirade, if you want to call it that, with the statement, “Jesus said to the crowds and to the disciples”—to the crowds and to the disciples. And he is saying, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees.” In other words, he is not primarily concerned with a little group of teachers or rabbis within Judaism. **He is concerned with the kind of behavior that they exemplify, but it isn’t necessary linked only to them.** In fact he is quite concerned that the disciples will practice this type of behavior, what he calls **hypocrisy, which has to do with externals, with appearances.** A hypocrite is an actor. I have quoted before Shakespeare who says, “All the world’s a stage.” The problem is what goes on on that stage is not really real; it’s just an act. That’s the point that Shakespeare is trying to make too.

People go through their lives and they play roles and they say things and they do things and they don’t see any alternative, but **they’re just playing a role; they’re really not present, not to God, not to themselves.** Augustine in his *Confessions* confesses, “You were always with me; I was not with you.” And he could have said **I was not with myself, the true self.** This is the problem, and **in religion** it leads to all kinds of silliness. **It leads to all kinds of rituals that are empty.** The basic meaning might be there, but the meaning isn’t being brought into the actual practice because there’s no awareness. To have meaning one has to be aware. **To do a ritual in a meaningful way one has to be very conscious of what one is doing.** So here Jesus is warning about empty rituals.

Then of course there is the whole idea of **rules.** The Pharisees were into rules, and Jesus criticized that. But here it’s almost the opposite. You have read where he says the Pharisees “bind

up many burdens and put them on other men's shoulders." Well that's part of making rules, **binding people with all kinds of restrictions.** But here it's the opposite. **Here they are going to great lengths to let people out of their oaths.** That's just as bad. People promise something; then they find some way where they aren't really obliged to follow that promise. **Legalism** isn't actually necessarily strict. It can be very strict, very detailed, or it can be very loose. The point is there's really **nothing about it that is pleasing to God because there's no sincere, conscious decisions. It's all playing;** it's all acting on a stage. It's all pretending; it's all trying to look good while inwardly trying to serve oneself. And that's usually because oneself is all one really knows. **There really isn't any God or anyone else in one's feeling life.** It's all about me. And that is the sad state of many people. It is a state that Jesus came to free us from, to deliver us from; but we have to cooperate, we have to listen, we have to follow.