

Nov 19, 2017

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God, our Maker, all people are important to you and you despise no one. Do not let us think we are more important than others, but make us more like Jesus, who loved especially those who were rejected. May we understand better that to know we really need you is to be filled with your gifts. We pray this prayer to you through Christ, our Lord.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

The scriptures give us many images of God: shepherd, king, eagle with her young, and so forth. Today's readings suggest the image of God as creative parent.

The reading from *Malachi* is a plea for unity, both in what is taught and in the relationships among the believers. The motivation for this unity is we have all been created by the same God.

Our Gospel for today presents the same, with a little more expansion. *Malachi* rebukes the priests of his time for not teaching the truth. Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who don't practice what they teach! His lesson ends with the same call to unity we find in *Malachi*. We are to call no one on earth master because we all have one Master. That truth motivates our equality.

*If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else.*

FIRST READING: *Malachi 1:8-10*

*This is a reading from the prophet Malachi.*

This is what God says to the priests of Israel:

"You have turned away from my ways. You have led my people away because of the things you teach. You have not kept my covenant, and you teach only what you want to teach and not the whole truth. So I will let the people see how wrong you are, and they will turn away from you."

The prophet *Malachi* said to the people:

"We have all been created by the same God, haven't we? Then why are we dishonest with each other? Why do we break the covenant of our family and hurt one another?"

*The Word of the Lord.*

RESPONSE: *Psalm 131*

REFRAIN:

Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in you. Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in you.

VERSES 1-3:

1. My God, I am not proud. I do not look for things too great.  
2. My God, I trust in you. You care for me, you give me peace.  
3. O Is-ra-el, trust in God, now and al-ways trust in God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

1. If you are hum-ble, God will re-ward you.  
2. Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia!

1.-2. If you are hum-ble, you will be blessed.

GOSPEL: *Matthew 23:1-12*

*This is a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.*

One day Jesus said to his disciples  
and all the people who were there with them,

“The Pharisees and teachers of the law  
are important people.

They are teachers of the law of Moses.

So do whatever they tell you.

But don't do what they do,  
because they say one thing  
and do something else.

They don't do  
what they teach other people to do.

“They do everything

so that people will notice them.

They want everyone to see what they do.

For example, when they pray,  
they wear clothes

that call attention to themselves,  
and they always take the places of honor  
at celebrations or in the synagogues.

They love to have people  
pay special attention to them  
and to call them, ‘teacher.’

“I don't want anyone to call you,  
‘teacher’ or ‘master,’

because you have only one teacher  
and one master—the Christ.

The one who is greatest among you  
is the servant.

If you try to make yourself important,  
you will stumble.

But if you are humble,  
God will make you great.”

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS  
WITH CHILDREN:

Both points of today's focus should  
be discussed. Help the children see  
that God is beyond *all* images. We  
can't see God. We don't know really  
what God is like. But we see what  
God does. So we say God is *like* (acts  
like) a shepherd because God guides  
and cares for us. God is also like a  
mother, a king, an eagle, a father, and  
so forth. These images help us to  
know God better. But God is not  
really any of those things. God acts  
like those things. This notion of  
images for God is extremely  
important in order that the children  
not be fixated on any one image. The  
multiple images of God in scripture  
give us a wonderful freedom in  
relating to God. Each of us finds in  
scripture those images most helpful  
to ourselves. We can, by presenting  
many images, help children grow in  
their relationship with God.

Ask the children:

- o How is God like a mother or  
father?

Lead the discussion along these  
lines (if possible in your situation.)  
Children who have the same father or  
mother are brothers and sisters.  
Malachi and Jesus tell us that  
because we all have the same God,  
who is like a father or mother, we are  
brothers and sisters. Explore that  
image (brothers and sisters) with the  
children. How do brothers and sisters  
act toward one another? Help them  
see that this is what Jesus means by  
“If you want to be the greatest, you  
must serve everyone else.” For  
Jesus, no one is better than anyone  
else. We are all equal and should  
serve one another.