

## Rectoría San Juan de Dios

XXXI Sunday of Ordinary Time-Cycle A

Mal 1, 14-2, 2.8-10; Ps 131; 1 Thes 2, 7-9.13; Mt 23, 1-12

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### Let Us Return to Authentic Religion

In today's Gospel, we can see that Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees because they have occupied the place of Moses, but without being committed to the people. They impose on others rigorisms of law that do not save or liberate, and which they themselves do not observe.

What Jesus sees in the faces of his hearers is weariness and disillusion with a religion that instead of allowing them to hear the voice of God, oppresses them with the voice of religious leaders who, in their thirst for prestige and power, do not seek the good of man, but rather to dominate him with their laws. Instead of giving them life, peace, and liberty, they increase the distance between man and God. If religion, as the renewal of the bond between God and man and between men, does not allow for listening to the voice of God, nor for experiencing salvation, it is not authentic and needs to be purified.

We see that the reality in which the people of God lived in the time of Jesus is similar to that in which we live today: we also seem to be living a religion that is not completely pure, a religion that no longer says much to us. But are only the priests guilty? Apparently not—most answer that so are the lay faithful.

The task of returning to our authentic religion is not only the task of priests, but also of every believer capable of

overcoming simulation of faith, lack of authenticity, and deceit of God, for within the heart of everyone lives the purest relationship with God and others.

How purely do you live your religion?

Today we want to work to renew the way in which we bring our faith to life, the way that we live our relationship with God and in which we make it clear that our religion is effective, that it satisfies our spiritual needs, that it saves us, following these three ideas:

1-Let us go from betrayal to fidelity.

God speaks to us through the prophet Malachi in the first reading when he condemns the priests for their betrayal of men. Betrayal of God, of their own religion, of others, and themselves is a constant theme in the history of the people of God.

Today, if we review our life, we will be able to identify specific moments in which we have betrayed not only God and religion—when we say we believe but behave as unbelievers—but also ourselves. It seems that having all the possibilities to live righteously, we sabotage ourselves, ignoring what God asks of us in His Word and what the Church asks of us in her doctrine. At times we betray God when we make decisions that compromise our faith or that go against it because we don't accept reality. In the case of a terminally ill relative, how many times have we sought solutions or interpretations that call into question the authenticity of our relationship with God or with the Church?

How important it is to discover the way to pass from our betrayals to fidelity!

## 2-Let us move from the Gospel to life.

The great crime of the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus condemns today is the incoherence of their lives: *they say one thing but do another*. The concrete point of authentic religion is that the Word of God moves all of my being to action.

St. Paul expresses it convincingly: *we loved you so much that we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well*. When the Gospel moves our will to act in God's love toward others, this experience of self-donation emerges. Here we can see, in a concrete way, how religion saves. In this case, we are not directing our attention to the person who receives the kindness, but to the one who gives, who allows God to move him by means of his Word. Acting in love, he experiences the unworthiness of serving as a conduit for God; he experiences that God acted in him, and due to his practicing his religion, he experienced that God saves, that his religion saves, that it is an authentic path to salvation.

Apart from that, no one can reject the love of a mother, or the intimacy and testimony of one who is moved by the living Word of God, ready to give his own life for him. Authentic religion is clearly obvious here, as we move from the Gospel to life.

## 3-Let us go from being teachers to being brothers.

Jesus presents an image of the dominating teacher who takes advantage of his position to increase his prestige and power, an exhibitionist teacher who with his attitude establishes an insurmountable distance from others. In the authentic religion that Jesus wants, rank or privilege does not

exist; we are all children of God the Father and thus we are all brothers.

Going from being teachers to brothers does not exempt parents from educating; this should always continue, as should the responsibility of religious leaders and politicians; but a change of attitude is necessary, one that overcomes all pretensions of superiority or domination. The only teacher, the only model of conduct, is Jesus. He did not want privileges: He made himself equal to us. He even wanted to give us His life.

If we think about it, many times we have behaved like teachers, with a pretense of superiority and dominating with our criteria, without letting the criteria of love and God's truth appear. That is why we are invited to get down from the chair of Moses and not usurp the place of God in our relationships with others, to detach ourselves from the trappings that distance us from others: our titles, pretentiousness, talismans, honors, privileges, prestige, power, etc.

In authentic religion, the term *brother* should have first place. Authentic religion equalizes us and liberates us; it leaves us open to God's appearing and to our hearing His voice.

Are you content with your religion? Does your religion liberate you, open a path to salvation for you? Would you like to change your religion?

Then why don't you try to purify it, in order to make it authentic... in order to enjoy it more?