

21<sup>st</sup> Wednesday II- Mt 23:27-32  
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082620.cfm>

Reading 1 **2 THESSALONIAN S 3:6-10, 16-18**

*We instruct you, brothers and sisters,  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
to shun any brother  
who walks in a disorderly way  
and not according to the tradition they  
received from us.  
For you know how one must imitate us.  
For we did not act in a disorderly way  
among you,  
nor did we eat food received free from  
anyone.  
On the contrary, in toil and drudgery,  
night and day we worked,  
so as not to burden any of you.  
Not that we do not have the right.  
Rather, we wanted to present ourselves  
as a model for you,  
so that you might imitate us.  
In fact, when we were with you, we  
instructed you that  
if anyone was unwilling to work, neither  
should that one eat.  
  
May the Lord of peace himself  
give you peace at all times and in every  
way.  
The Lord be with all of you.  
  
This greeting is in my own hand, Paul's.  
This is the sign in every letter; this is how I  
write.  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with  
all of you.*

Responsorial Psalm **PSALM 128:1-2, 4-5**

*Blessed are you who fear the LORD,  
who walk in his ways!  
For you shall eat the fruit of your  
handiwork;  
blessed shall you be, and favored.*

*Behold, thus is the man blessed  
who fears the LORD.  
The LORD bless you from Zion:  
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.*

Gospel **MATTHEW 23:27-32**

*Jesus said,  
"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you  
hypocrites.  
You are like whitewashed tombs, which  
appear beautiful on the outside, but  
inside are full of dead men's bones and  
every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside  
you appear righteous, but inside you are  
filled with hypocrisy and evil-doing.  
  
"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you  
hypocrites.  
You build the tombs of the prophets  
and adorn the memorials of the  
righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in  
the days of our ancestors, we would not  
have joined them in shedding the  
prophets' blood.'  
  
Thus you bear witness against yourselves  
that you are the children of those who  
murdered the prophets; now fill up what  
your ancestors measured out!"*



If my sister scolded me with, “You hypocrite; just shut up!” well, I think I would be duly stung. Brothers & sisters and husbands & wives are familiar with the failings of loved ones.

A 5<sup>th</sup> Century sermon attributed to Pseudo-Chrysostom tells us,

*Christ lays bare here the natural habit of all wicked men; each readily apprehends the other’s fault, but none his own; for in another’s case each man has an unprejudiced heart, but in his own case it is distorted.*<sup>i</sup>

May I plead guilty. There have been times when I’ve gotten puffed up and judgmental, when I think I clearly see what is lacking in another, but blind to my own selfish and self-serving behavior. That’s what’s sisters are for, right: to strip off our blinders.

That’s what Jesus is for, right? Among his acts of salvation, he strips off our blinders—if we let him. However, we, being made in God’s own divine image, are allowed to choose to act other than divinely. But he doesn’t let me escape without warning: WOE.

Jesus’s rebuke warns of the consequences of their self-serving behavior at the expense of others. “Woe” is a harbinger of affliction, sorrow and distress. It brings to mind other passages found in Matthew about the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Gnashing is when one grinds their teeth or bites down in pain or anguish.

We heard today the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of Matthew’s Seven Woes:

- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites*
- *You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings.*
  - *You make one [convert] a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves.*
  - *Which is greater, the gold [in the temple], or the temple that made the gold sacred?*
  - *You pay tithes... and have neglected... judgment and mercy and fidelity.*
  - *You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence.*
  - *You are like whitewashed tombs... but inside are full of dead men’s bones.*
  - *You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous [yet] you are the children of those who murdered the prophets.*

Jesus announces the judgment against them:

*Now fill up what your ancestors measured out!* -- Murder is what was measured out.

The fundamental charge laid against them is hypocrisy—a gap between appearance and reality, between saying and doing, caused by a misplaced hierarchy of values and excessive emphasis on external matters to the neglect of the interior.<sup>ii</sup>

These charges come at a culmination of events when Jesus' mission is increasingly opposed by powers that be.

These same charges are relevant again later after Jesus' Ascension against the Jewish leaders who were in opposition of Matthew's young Christian community.

These same charges could even be legitimately leveled at times over the past 2000 years at the Universal Church.

Pseudo-Chrysostom tells us:

*While He corrects the Jews, He instructs the Christians;  
for had these things been spoken to the former only,  
they would have been spoken, but not written;  
but now they were spoken on their account, and written on ours.<sup>iii</sup>*

And, of course, I have no standing to point my finger at anyone. The evil we find in others, in institutions historical or contemporary, is the same evil that seeks residence in our hearts. Our selfishness opens the door.

Our protection against hypocrisy is following the way of Jesus, just like that early Matthean community.

- *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. (Lk 10:27)*
- *I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. (Jn 13:34)*
- *Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.  
For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.  
Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. (Mt 25: 34-40)*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.<sup>iv</sup>*



i *Catena Aurea: Volume 1-4* compiled by Thomas Aquinas

ii Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series, The Liturgical Press, Vol. 1, p. 326

iii *Catena Aurea: Volume 1-4* compiled by Thomas Aquinas

iv *The Jesus Prayer*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus\\_Prayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Prayer)