

FIRST READING: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a, 14-17

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians:

We ask you, brothers and sisters, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a “spirit,” or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand. Let no one deceive you in any way. To this end he has also called you through our Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 96:10, 11-12, 13

The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Say among the nations: The LORD is king. He has made the world firm, not to be moved; he governs the peoples with equity.

The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them! Then shall all the trees of the forest exult.

The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Before the LORD, for he comes; for he comes to rule the earth. He shall rule the world with justice and the peoples with his constancy.

The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Gospel: Matthew 23:23-26

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 21st Tuesday of the Year

Paul has addressed two issues with regard to the mystery of Jesus. Jesus will return at the end of the age to establish the Kingdom of God. Paul and the early Church anticipated this event to happen very soon. We, two thousand years later, still wait for Jesus return. We don't anticipate it for some time to come. They did not have any idea when it would be. Nor do we; only God knows when Jesus will return. Apparently, in Paul's time, people pretended to know the day and hour. There are also people in our time who think they know too. Paul has told us not to listen to people who think they know and trust in God.

Paul has also related the community assembled with Jesus. So do we. Each time we gather with others in Jesus' name, He's there among us. Jesus sits at the Father's right hand. He will return one day. He also promised to remain with us until he returns. Jesus guaranteed his presence within his Church in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke told us that, on the day of Easter, two disciples met Jesus as they traveled and knew him when they sat down together and broke bread. The presence of Jesus has remained the central experience of the Church and sustains us as we move to the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist is our food for the journey. In Paul's day, it was too

Who were the scribes and the Pharisees? Scribes were men educated in the Law and the Prophets. They could read and write and were essential in copying the text of the bible. Printing had not yet been invented so every document was hand written. Many of these men could speak and write in more than one language, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. They had key roles in religion, politics, business and the daily lives of people. Since they inscribed the biblical texts, they also interpreted scripture for the people. The Pharisees were a particular sect within Judaism. They were very big on the interpretation and integration of Mosaic Law into the lives of the community. Both of these groups represented the establishment to Jesus and his followers. They tested and opposed Jesus whenever they could. They wielded a great deal of authority.

In today's passage, Jesus critiqued the Pharisees and scribes for being concerned with trivia when larger religious concerns remained for them ignored. Basically Jesus has called them a bunch of phonies. They put on a good show of religiosity while inside they can be pretty empty and malicious. It's always tempting to point our fingers at other people but Jesus has intended his message to those of us who read these words. I always ask how I'm like them. I can always become more real and integral inside and out. So can we all.

May Jesus always be our guide.

James D. Beath
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