

Commentary to the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A –

Devout and religious, but far from God



Introduction

At the time of Jesus there were many Jewish sects. Some are also mentioned in the Gospels: the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Zealots.... All of them disappeared except the Pharisees who survived the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the catastrophe of 70 AD. Without the Pharisees, Israel would no longer exist.

When we hear of them, the invective of Jesus immediately resounds in our ears: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." But were the members of this sect really a repository of evil and wickedness? The people worshiped them for their knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and their ascetic austerity. They were considered legitimate masters, enlightened leaders and, without their support, it was not possible to win the sympathy and the consent of the people.

They were faithful to God and respectful of all moral laws which they scrupulously and blamelessly observed. They would have been the religious group closer to Jesus. Instead they became his fiercest opponents. How so?

Some of them—perhaps many—from the early years of the church, were converted (Acts 15:5).

However, entering the Christian community, they brought with them the legalistic mentality, the religious formalism, the moral rigor, the conviction of obtaining salvation by their own good works. Above all, their image of God was that of a stern and strict judge, incompatible with the God preached by Jesus.

The Pharisees are not missing. They will never disappear, because "a Pharisee" is hidden in every disciple. When he re-emerges, he spreads his yeast of death, a yeast against which one must be on guard (Mt 16:6).

To internalize the message, we repeat:

"The Pharisee is devout, religious, blameless, and yet, paradoxically, away from God."

First Reading: Malachi 1:14 b–2:2b.8-10

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9.13

Fr. Fernando Armellini - <http://bibleclaret.org>