



## Pharisees: Call to Internal Transformation

Matthew 23: 13-22.

30<sup>th</sup> August 2017

21<sup>st</sup> Week of Ordinary Time, Year A

The scathing attacks on the Pharisees by Jesus continues again today in Matthew 23. Jesus makes these strong statements against the Pharisees:

On Monday this week he warned them against locking others from entering the Kingdom of God: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter."

And also misleading other to Hell: "You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves."

But who are these Pharisees? They are mentioned 98 times in the New Testament and 10 times in the Gospels. To a great extent Pharisees were respected and feared at the same time. They were spiritual leaders of the Jews, had strict adherence to the Law, lived simple lives, were very strict about the Jewish customs and spiritualized the customs to the extent of oppressing the poor.

In Mark 7: 3-4 we read that Pharisees had strict adherence to specific rituals like: not eating unless they wash their hands; washing their feet and hands when they come from the market places; and had rituals for washing of cups, pitchers, and other utensils.

In Matthew 23 Jesus condemns the Pharisees for: their a) obsession with religious authority in the community b) focus on self-recognition in places of honor c) constant persistence on converting others without giving the latter the necessary support d) obsession with legalism – ‘loading it over them’ - especially pushing people to strictly observe the law.

In today’s Gospel Jesus condemns the Pharisees: 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.

Jesus would like the Phasisees to focus on the purification of the self and to find God in that process of self-purification. They need to focus on self-conversion and know that what matters is the love of God and neighbour.

Thus Jesus wants the Pharisees to focus on the essential – as Prophet Micah (6:8) once stated: “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? “

A husband and wife for a long time struggled to understand each other and kept quarrelling over minor things. The husband was an IT specialist and the wife a psychologist. Their quarrels were based on the self knowledge and profession. They would call each other names – whenever the husband would notice that they wife was taking long to understand what he is saying he would call her ‘loadist’ – meaning it took her too long to download what he was saying or that he say: ‘it seems your operating system is clogged up.’ On the other hand the wife would use psychological terms on the husband such as: ‘you are an hallucigenic psychopath with an inferiority complex personality.’

At one point the husband could not take it any more and went to see his parish priest. He explained to him how his wife was such a burden and why he thought their marriage was not working after 15 years. The priest listened and asked him a number of questions. The husband insisted it was the wife in the wrong. He also told the priest not to tell the wife. The man came back feeling better and told the wife: ‘I went to see the parish priest today’, he said. The wife asked, ‘what about?’ He answered: “I complained about my work, my work mates, and that my wif is a burden – all the Ws are just a problem.’ The wife

said, 'pardon me – did you just say your wife is a burden?' 'No', said the husband, 'I meant wifi, computer, internet, not wife.' 'Well', said the wife, 'I am sure you had mental overlap – you simply wanted to say, 'my wife is a burden.' 'That is not what I meant', said the husband, 'I know you know nothing about computers, my wifi at work is not working.' 'But ours is working' said the wife. 'Well, the fact that our is working does not mean that in the whole of Kenya wifi is working!' 'Oh I see', said the wife.'

The wife then decided to go see the parish priest. She said to the priest, my husband said I am a burden.' The priest was surprised and asked: 'Did he really say that?' 'No, I mean, he said his wifi is a burden but I know he meant, my wife is a burden.' The parish priest listened to all the complaints the wife had about the husband and said, perhaps I can meet with both of you and discuss this matter so that I can take you through internal transformation.' The wife agreed and went and talked to the husband: 'I met the parish priest and we talked about the wifi.' 'Oh really', said the husband. 'That man knows nothing about IT', he added. 'Oh yes, he does, and we need to go meet him,' said the wife. 'He knows nothing about IT, I have said.' 'I can tell you he knows a lot about IT, internal transformation', said the wife. 'Pardon me', said the husband. 'IT means Information Technology, once again you are an ignoramus in computer matters.' 'Ok then, still, let us go and meet and you will talk about your IT, and I will talk about my IT', explained the wife.

They went to see the parish priest who helped them discover their inner selves, unmasked their egos and pretence and invited them to embrace – love, understanding and forgiveness. At the end of the three weeks of regular meetings – the husband said, 'you have transformed me from within, I have moved from flash disc, to hard drive to the mother-board.' The wife said, 'you have helped me to discover my Johari Windows and I can now confidently walk into my dark room.'

The Johari window that the wife referred to can help us discover ourselves so that rather than wash the cup from outside we would wash from inside. Johari window has four sections of our lives:

- 1 – Open self: the part of me that I know and others know;
- 2 – Hidden Self: the information about you that you know and others don't.
- 3- Blind self: the information about you that that others know and you don't.

4- Unknown self: the information about you that neither you or other know anything about – the dark room that unless I take time to discover myself deep inside, I can never know myself.

The process of self-conversion can lead us to discover room 4 in the Johari Window.

You can do an exercise of Johari Window in your room by having 'a wall of fame' where you put all the things you are proud of, and towards the end of the room, 'a wall of shame' on the things you are not so proud of and which you need to work on. Every time you leave the room, you walk away from the 'wall of shame' with the commitment to do better, but as you approach the door, you are proud of the 'wall of fame' that gives you the confidence of becoming a better person.

St. Ignatius of Loyola talks of the 3 classes of men. The three have received great amounts of wealth and know that they must get rid of it in order to attain the Kingdom of God. The first class does not make any effort and prefers to keep the wealth. The second makes an effort and but takes a compromising approach and expects God to come down to meet his desires. The third is totally free and indifferent and willing to let go of everything in order to follow Christ.

Ours is an invitation to let go of that which takes us away from God – we need to walk in and out of our spiritual room with the confidence that the Lord will help us discover ourselves right from the inside.

And like Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians: We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, For our Gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

God is good, all the time, and all the time, God is good!

Fr. Elias Opongo, SJ