

Wednesday in the twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13; Ps 139: 7-8.9-10. 11-12ab (R.1); Mt 23: 27-32

The readings of this day remind me two realities: the first one is the suggestion of God found in the book of Deuteronomy (30: 19) that says: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then that you and your descendants may live." In that sense, the way of the Pharisees is presented by the Lord Jesus-Christ as the way of death and the example of Paul is implicitly offered as the way of life. The word of God is operative in those who believe, but the Pharisees are rather busy trying to make other believe in unreality in order for them to benefit from that credit for the prosperity of their business.

The second reality these passages remind of is the African view that "even the black cow gives white milk." In this saying the African wise man acknowledges the essential reality beyond surface level analysis while he concurs with this other saying that affirms that "appearances can be deceptive." On this note therefore, I invite us to meditate on authenticity. Two contrasting examples could help us to illustrate our assertions. Karl Marx is reported in a story to have been authentic to his teaching (although in a negative manner). On the day of his death (March 14, 1883), *God sent an angel to ask him why he spent his life corrupting the world redeemed at a high prize. A few days pass and God does not see his messenger return to heaven. He then sent another messenger to call back the first: "I don't understand why he is spending days on a mission that requires a few minutes." The second angel appears hours later before God with the first behind him.* Soon as God started to address him, he vehemently interrupted God saying: "God, be modest; after all we are equal!" This otherwise heretical story states that the man was so convinced of his doctrine that he remains himself even after death and is ready to convince angels that he was right. [In reality angels don't change their minds to turn against God]. The second example is that of Saint Paul who is ready to confront any angel who would preach another gospel. Paul is so convinced of his Damascus road and subsequent experiences of the Risen Christ that he would not admit of doubt. In Galatians 1: 8 he warns the community about the truth of what he preached. In several occasions (one of which is 1 Cor 4: 16) – including our first reading today, Paul invites his audience to become his "imitators as himself is imitator of Christ Jesus". This is the model of authentic life. Saint Paul preaches from his own practice of the faith. This is the call of God to each one of us today. The spirit of pharisaism is found in moralism, Biblicism, ritualism, dogmatism, legalism, spiritualism... all indicators of idolatry. Even in the studies of peace processes, we may get obsessively attached to a particular theory. We then become excessively narrow in our handling of complex issues – that can never find solutions simplistically. The human heart is the ultimate battle ground for every reality among humans. The pharisaic mind thus 'canonizes' a particular way of seeing and doing things – out of sheer preference. At the end of it all, it is the person him/herself that is the idol to be worshipped. That is why the Church always invites us to trust less in our 'wounded intellect and will' but more in the word of God that is also the Church-itself and the signs of daily life-events in which God encounters us. How can we be authentic theologians and peace builders? We become what we profess we are by incarnating what we believe, just like Paul in the Thessalonians. Mahatma Gandhi also left a few lines on how to become non-violent - not only in spirit and speech by through personal experience of granting forgiveness to brutal opponents. Saint John of the Cross was once called on to examine the authenticity of a certain sister who was visibly a living saint. He found her

indeed 'holy' in everything but humility. Hers was therefore a different kind of 'holiness' – surely not divine. In the early eighteenth century, a monastery of sisters at Port Royal (France) was investigated by Church authorities. Among the points of the report was: “These women are as pure as angels and as proud as demons.” This statement was an indicator of their lack of authenticity. And for those who have studied Bernard Lonergan, they can easily grasp this concept of authenticity through several variables that he proposes towards our growth into higher levels of *responsibility* for ourselves and for others before God. I will just invoke three areas - for easy remembrance – where authenticity can be verified for us today even at Hekima University College. One sign of authenticity is “*Goodness*”. How good is my intention? How good are my words and actions? We receive from the Lord that “by their fruit you shall know them!” A second sign of authenticity is our capacity to “*rejoice in the Lord*”. All is oriented to God the main criterion of appreciation. The slogan of the authentic in Christ is “to God all the glory!” Those believers are less concerned about opinion and personal gains. They have their eyes fixed upon the Lord and his holy will. The third sign is that of “*desiring to be corrected*.” When we look at great scholars like Fr. Magesa, we see that they publish much. In this process they submit themselves to peer-reviews and several corrections. How about us who might be less prominent? Can we allow correction? I wish all of us, most particularly our brothers and sisters in the first year of Theology or Peace Studies to offer themselves to such growth in authenticity through the sign of *humility*. I wish all of us to grow in our convictions about the love of God for us, for our College and for the world. In this way we may be able to stand against angels or demons to proclaim by our lives we believe in: Peace comes through justice, and *God is Love*.

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