

Jesus modeled the good life

31st Sunday of the Year (November 3): (R3) Matthew 23:1-12; (R1) Malachi 1:14-2:2, 8-10; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13.

A few years ago there was a poll that asked the question, "Which member of your family is the best looking?" A majority of the respondents listed themselves as the best-looking member of their family.

Another public opinion poll asked people which member of their family was the smartest. Once again, "Myself" or "Me" was the highest-ranked answer.

But when asked which family member was the most likely to tell a lie, "Myself" or "Me" ranked ninth out of 10 possible answers.

In other words, most of us think we are better looking, smarter and more honest than the rest of the family.

In our Lord's time there were the Scribes and Pharisees. They were Jewish scholars and experts in the Law of Moses. Following God's command was the focus of their lives. In their desperate desire to obey God's laws, the Pharisees began piling up more and more rules. God gave his people 10 commandments. The Pharisees piled up more than 622 commandments and felt that a Jew must follow these to be righteous.

Jesus' view of serving God was significantly different.

For one thing, the Pharisees valued rules over relationships. Jesus, on the contrary, was concerned about establishing relationships. Jesus taught that loving God and one's neighbor is more important than keeping rules. Rules would follow.

Also, the Pharisees valued appearances over authenticity. Looking good was more important to them than doing good. Pride, position and what other people thought were more important than sacrifice and service. Jesus said that "Everything they do is done for men to see."

The Pharisees wore small leather boxes called phylacteries on their wrists and foreheads. These phylacteries contained verses of Scripture. Some of the Pharisees began wearing larger and larger phylacteries, as if to show that they were more religious than their colleagues. What people thought was more important to them than what God thought.

Finally, the Pharisees valued "respectability" over righteousness. As Jesus said, "They loved places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in market-places and the salutation 'Rabbi.'"

Once a girl told her father that God was calling her to serve as a missionary. He refused to let her go. When she finally set out to pursue her calling, he commented that he



Father Albert Shamon

A word for Sunday

had wanted his daughter to be a respectable Christian — not a real one.

What makes the difference between a respectable Christian and a real one? Jesus said, "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus never wore fancy robes or phylacteries. He hung out with outcasts and sinners.

Instead of expecting the place of honor at banquets, Jesus took the place of the lowest servant and washed his disciples' feet.

In the second century, an anonymous man wrote a letter in which he described Christians. "They marry and have children just like everyone else," he wrote, "but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table but not a shared bed. They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws and go beyond the laws in their own lives."

Jesus wasn't trying to abolish the Law of Moses. He was trying to show people that life flows from living in a true relationship with God.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

DAILY READINGS

Monday, November 4
Philippians 2:1-4; Psalms 131:1-3; Luke 14:12-14

Tuesday, November 5
Philippians 2:5-11; Psalms 22:26-32; Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday, November 6
Philippians 2:12-18; Psalms 27:1, 4, 13-14; Luke 14:25-33

Thursday, November 7
Philippians 3:3-8A; Psalms 105:2-7; Luke 15:1-10

Friday, November 8
Philippians 3:17-4:1; Psalms 122:1-5; Luke 16:1-8

Saturday, November 9
Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12; Psalms 84:3-6, 8, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:9C-11, 16-17; John 2:13-22

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