

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #151

READING I Malachi 1:14b—2:2b, 8–10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

A **great King** am I, says the **LORD** of **hosts**,
and my **name** will be **feared** among the **nations**.
And **now**, O **priests**, this **commandment** is for you:
If you **do not listen**,
if you **do not lay** it to **heart**,
to give **glory** to my **name**, says the **LORD** of **hosts**,
I will send a **curse** upon you
and of your **blessing** I will make a **curse**.
You have **turned aside** from the **way**,
and have caused **many** to **falter** by your **instruction**;
you have made **void** the **covenant** of **Levi**,
says the **LORD** of **hosts**.
I, therefore, have made you **contemptible**
and **base** before **all** the **people**,
since you **do not keep** my **ways**,
but show **partiality** in your **decisions**.
Have we not **all** the **one father**?
Has not the **one God** created us?
Why then do we break **faith** with one **another**,
violating the **covenant** of our **fathers**?

Malachi = MAL-uh-ki

A poetic and heroic-sounding reading,
with alluring oratorical overtones.

Emphasis on "curse," which focuses the
drama of the reading.

contemptible = kuhn-TEMP-tuh-b*1

Let the forcefulness of the questions that
conclude this reading draw you to its end.

READING I

Today's first reading is from the Book of Malachi, which is believed to have been written after the Babylonian Exile. In the verses immediately preceding this reading, the prophet describes God as feeling dishonored and suggests that someone should just shut the gates to the Temple so that the priests cannot make defiling or imperfect offerings on the altar. He also casts blame on those who provide the animals for temple sacrifice: they promise with a vow that an animal is appropriate for sacrifice and then, at the

time of sacrifice, replace it with a defective one. How disingenuous!

With this context in mind, today's reading begins with the prophet voicing God's assertion that he is a king whose "name will be feared among the nations." Although this statement of universal fear is an exaggeration, the claims of God's universal kingship are valid insofar as God is the creator and sustainer of all life and should be worshipped as such, especially by God's chosen people and by the priests who are charged with carrying out Levi's legacy. Levi was one of the sons of Jacob and

founder of the tribe of Levi. The other tribes were allotted land as Moses had promised before they entered the Promised Land (Numbers 33–34), but the tribe of Levi was not given its own land, because "the LORD, the God of Israel, is their heritage, as he had promised them" (Joshua 13:33). Malachi describes Levi as having integrity and as capable of turning people away from the ways of evil with his instruction (Malachi 2:6). By contrast, these temple priests do not give God the honor that is due and use their teaching to advance their own desires. Therefore, God says that he will

For meditation and context:

Thessalonians = thes-uh-LOH-nee-uhnz

Paul describes the trouble he has undergone to bring the Gospel to the Thessalonians as a way of praising them for receiving the Good News. In the first half, Paul describes his trouble. In the second half, he turns the description into praise.

Here the second half begins, and the tone becomes more uplifting.

shame them before the people. At the end of the reading, the prophet speaks in his own words, using several rhetorical questions to make the point that Israel is different from other nations, who identify themselves merely by ethnicity or other human factors. In fact, Israel is one family, the children of God, and refusing to uphold the covenant of their ancestors, in essence, makes them “break faith with one another.”

READING II In our second reading, Paul presents himself and his fellow missionaries in a way that is quite

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 131:1, 2, 3

R. In you, Lord, I have found my peace.

O LORD, my heart is not proud,
nor are my eyes haughty;
I busy not myself with great things,
nor with things too sublime for me.

Nay rather, I have stilled and quieted
my soul like a weaned child.
Like a weaned child on its mother's lap,
so is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the LORD,
both now and forever.

READING II 1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians

Brothers and sisters:

We were **gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children.**

With **such affection for you, we were determined to share with you**

not only the **gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us.**

You **recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery.**

Working **night and day in order not to burden any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.**

And for **this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.**

different from the priests of Malachi's time. In the sentences that precede this reading, he writes about the indignities they faced in Philippi, which gave them courage to speak the Good News of God to the people of Thessalonica. They did so, Paul says, without deception or delusion or flattery or greed. Moreover, they did not push their weight around by claiming and exploiting their role as apostles (1 Thessalonians 2:1–6a).

Our reading begins with Paul asserting that he and his comrades were gentle and affectionate with the Thessalonian community, acting as wet nurses among them. The

“nutrition” they share with the community is the Good News, of course, but also their very selves. Such is their love (literally, “yearning”) for these Christians! By noting the sufferings that Paul and his co-missionaries endured on their behalf and explaining how they worked to avoid being a burden to them, Paul is again asserting that the community was not coerced in any way to receive the Good News. Instead, they knew it to be God's Word, which they allow to work in them. For this reason, he continually gives thanks to God.

A scornful and critical reading that includes challenging imperatives.

Slight pause between "burdens" and "hard."

phylacteries = fih-LAK-tuh-reez

Consider how strange it is for Jesus to tell the crowd not to call anyone "Rabbi," a commonplace honorific for referring to a teacher.

Stranger still to tell the crowd not to call anyone "father." Same goes for "Master."

The reading concludes with an inversion: exalts-humbles to humbles-exalted.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Recognize how important your proclamation of the Word of God is. Prepare well and take joy in your ministry.

GOSPEL Matthew 23:1–12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus spoke to the **crowds** and to his **disciples**, saying,
 "The **scribes** and the **Pharisees**
 have **taken** their **seat** on the **chair** of **Moses**.
Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you,
 but **do not follow** their **example**.
 For they **preach** but they do not **practice**.
 They **tie up heavy burdens hard to carry**
 and **lay** them on **people's shoulders**,
 but they **will not lift** a **finger** to **move** them.
 All their **works** are **performed** to be **seen**.
 They **widen** their **phylacteries** and **lengthen** their **tassels**.
 They love **places of honor** at **banquets**,
seats of honor in **synagogues**,
greetings in **marketplaces**, and the salutation '**Rabbi**.'
 As for **you, do not** be called '**Rabbi**.'
 You have but **one teacher**, and you are **all brothers**.
 Call **no one** on **earth** your **father**;
 you have but **one Father** in **heaven**.
 Do **not** be called '**Master**';
 you have but **one master**, the **Christ**.
 The **greatest** among you must be your **servant**.
 Whoever **exalts himself** will be **humbled**;
 but whoever **humbles himself** will be **exalted**."

GOSPEL

Today's Gospel is the introduction to Matthew's version of the woes that Jesus issues against the scribes and Pharisees. Among prophetic literary forms, a woe is a lamentation or expression of grief followed by charges issued against the persons to whom the woe is directed. Like Malachi's charges against the temple priests in our first reading, Jesus' charges against the scribes and Pharisees highlight the human condition and the potential for people in positions of power to abuse their authority. Thus, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus

advises his disciples and the crowd that had gathered around them that they should heed the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, experts in the Law, because they hold "the chair of Moses," that is, a symbol of Moses' authority, but they should not follow their example. He goes on to name practices that these people employ to bring attention to themselves and impose heavy religious burdens on those who have less power than themselves. Phylacteries, the small leather boxes worn on the forehead and left arm, and tassels are both intended to be reminders to follow

covenant law (see Deuteronomy 11:18; Numbers 15:38–39) but making them bigger and longer is a violation of the spirit of the law. No matter a person's station on earth, even if they are in positions of honor or power or instruction, there is only one who deserves the full weight of those titles: God. The Matthean Jesus' message is that the greatest and most exalted should be a humble servant. C.C.