

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God, our Maker, all people
are important to you
and you despise no one.
Do not let us think we are
more important than others,
but make us more like Jesus,
who loved especially those
who were rejected.
May we understand better
that to know
we really need you
is to be filled with your gifts.
We pray this prayer to you
through Christ, our Lord.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

The scriptures give us many
images of God: shepherd, king, eagle
with her young, and so forth.
Today's readings suggest the image
of God as creative parent.

The reading from *Malachi* is a
plea for unity, both in what is taught
and in the relationships among the
believers. The motivation for this
unity is we have all been created by
the same God.

Our Gospel for today presents the
same, with a little more expansion.
Malachi rebukes the priests of his
time for not teaching the truth. Jesus
warns against the hypocrisy of the
Pharisees who don't practice what
they teach! His lesson ends with the
same call to unity we find in *Malachi*.
We are to call no one on earth master
because we all have one Master.
That truth motivates our equality.

*If you want to be the greatest,
you must serve everyone else.*

FIRST READING: *Malachi* 1:8-10

This is a reading from the prophet Malachi.

This is what God says to the priests of Israel:

"You have turned away from my ways.
You have led my people away
because of the things you teach.
You have not kept my covenant,
and you teach only what you want to teach
and not the whole truth.
So I will let the people see
how wrong you are,
and they will turn away from you."

The prophet *Malachi* said to the people:

"We have all been created
by the same God, haven't we?
Then why are we dishonest with each other?
Why do we break the covenant of our family
and hurt one another?"

The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSE: *Psalm* 131

REFRAIN:

Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in

you. Like a child rests in its moth-er's arms, so will I rest in you. *Fine*

VERSES 1-3:

1. My God, — I am not proud. I do not look for things too great.
2. My God, — I trust in you. You care for me, you give me peace.
3. O Is-ra-el, — trust in God, — now and al-ways trust in God. *to Refrain*

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

1. If you are hum-ble, God will re-ward you.
2. Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia!

1.-2. If you are hum-ble, you will be blessed.

GOSPEL: *Matthew 23:1-12*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

One day Jesus said to his disciples
and all the people who were there with them,

“The Pharisees and teachers of the law
are important people.

They are teachers of the law of Moses.

So do whatever they tell you.

But don't do what they do,
because they say one thing
and do something else.

They don't do
what they teach other people to do.

“They do everything
so that people will notice them.

They want everyone to see what they do.

For example, when they pray,
they wear clothes

that call attention to themselves,
and they always take the places of honor
at celebrations or in the synagogues.

They love to have people
pay special attention to them
and to call them, ‘teacher.’

“I don't want anyone to call you,
‘teacher’ or ‘master,’

because you have only one teacher
and one master—the Christ.

The one who is greatest among you
is the servant.

If you try to make yourself important,
you will stumble.

But if you are humble,
God will make you great.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
WITH CHILDREN:

Both points of today's focus should be discussed. Help the children see that God is beyond *all* images. We can't see God. We don't know really what God is like. But we see what God does. So we say God is *like* (acts like) a shepherd because God guides and cares for us. God is also like a mother, a king, an eagle, a father, and so forth. These images help us to know God better. But God is not really any of those things. God acts like those things. This notion of images for God is extremely important in order that the children not be fixated on any one image. The multiple images of God in scripture give us a wonderful freedom in relating to God. Each of us finds in scripture those images most helpful to ourselves. We can, by presenting many images, help children grow in their relationship with God.

Ask the children:

- How is God like a mother or father?

Lead the discussion along these lines (if possible in your situation.) Children who have the same father or mother are brothers and sisters. Malachi and Jesus tell us that because we all have the same God, who is like a father or mother, we are brothers and sisters. Explore that image (brothers and sisters) with the children. How do brothers and sisters act toward one another? Help them see that this is what Jesus means by “If you want to be the greatest, you must serve everyone else.” For Jesus, no one is better than anyone else. We are all equal and should serve one another.