

**Liturgy of the Word with Children**  
**Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A**  
**5 November 2023**  
**Matthew 23:1-12**

### **Catechist Background**

Having roundly won arguments with all his opponents, Jesus addresses the disciples and the crowds directly, advising them to follow the advice of the scribes and the Pharisees, but not their actions. It seems they were engaged in a competition to wear the most obvious phylacteries (boxes containing scripture, taking literally the commands of Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18) and tassels (worn as a reminder to keep the commandments, as in Numbers 15:37-39) designed to impress others with their ostentatious 'piety' rather than soften the heart of the wearer as was their original intention. It may be useful to use a translation that does not make specific mention of these items, or you may spend an inordinate amount of time explaining the purpose and history of phylacteries and tassels.

'Rabbi' can be translated as 'teacher,' but also means 'my master,' 'my lord,' 'my great one.' The modern role of a rabbi only came about after the reorganisation of Jewish life after the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD. Also, the notion of a rabbi as roughly equivalent to Christian clergy is a very recent development, within the last century or so.

Most scripture scholars would not take literally Jesus' admonition to refrain from calling anyone our father or our teacher. Matthew's first audience seems to have had the same temptation as the Pharisees in liking to be esteemed for their apparent righteousness—a temptation that is still prevalent today. They were focussed on inventing titles for themselves rather than showing their love for God and others in the action of service. Jesus' warning does not need to prevent us from acknowledging our educators, our genealogy, or (indeed) our parish priest. We are all brothers and sisters in God's family, and we should treat each other as such, not rungs on a piety ladder.

### **Setting the Scene**

For the activity described below, you will need crosses made from paper/card (one for every child) and drawing materials.

### **We Say Sorry**

Leader: You are our Teacher, Lord have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: You have called us all your children, Christ have mercy.

**All: Christ, have mercy.**

Leader: You call us to you every day, Lord have mercy.

**All: Lord, have mercy.**

### **Gloria**

### **We Pray (1)**

God, remove our selfishness so that we can praise you with our whole lives.  
Amen.

### **Gospel Acclamation**

**Gospel:** Matthew 23:1-12

## Reflecting on the Reading with Children

- If someone wanted to show that they were a Christian without saying a word, what might they wear?
- Does wearing a certain type of clothing or jewellery make a person a good follower of Jesus? What does make someone a good follower of Jesus?

## Response

Try to draw out that it is not what we wear or even what we say that makes us followers of Jesus, but how we live our lives. People can wear Christian symbols if they want to, but the real sign of being a Christian is treating others the way we think Jesus would. You may want to demonstrate by putting on an ostentatious (possibly very large and made from cardboard) cross, and showing that if you kick another person or say hurtful words while wearing it, you are not being true to Jesus' love. This is like what the Pharisees did.

Pass out paper/card crosses to the children and help them to think of one action that they will make an extra effort to perform during the week to show Jesus' love to others. Encourage them to draw (or write) their plan on the cross. Invite each child to come up and place his/her cross around a centrepiece as a symbol of their commitment.

## We Believe

Relating to the creed what you have shared with the children, ask this series of questions and invite the children to reply, 'I do.'

- Do you believe in God, the Father of all of us?
- Do you believe in Jesus, our Teacher, the Christ?
- Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, living within us today?

## We Pray (2)

Again, try to relate the bidding prayers to the reading by saying, 'Jesus taught us to remember all of our brothers and sisters all over the world, and so we remember and pray for people everywhere...'

Leader: We pray for all people whose job it is to teach others about Jesus, that they are faithful in both their words and in their actions. Lord in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray that the world may be a peaceful place. Lord in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for people who have many burdens, especially the burdens of poverty. Lord in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We pray for anyone we may know who is feeling unhappy about anything. Help us to show them your love. Lord in your mercy,

**All: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Lord, help us to follow your teachings, to show love to those around us, not just in our words but in our actions. We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

**All: Amen.**

