

## Scripture Reading

### A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew (*Matthew 5:20*)

(Jesus said) I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

## Reflection – Getting rid of our lukewarmness and the Pharisee within us

**Living a worldly life and a watered down version of God's Word.** Though well-trained in the religion, the Pharisees could not resist the trappings of a worldly life. They forgot their allegiance to God. They were caught up with the world like everyone else. They tried to get as much as they can for themselves from the world. The Pharisees tried to find the easy way out especially regarding the harder teachings of God. For instance, they tried to justify the practice of divorce among themselves by asking Jesus in public about marriage and justifying divorce by bringing up the fact that Moses allowed divorce. They were not really interested in why marriage is indissoluble in God's eyes but they merely wanted to use the issue to trip Jesus up and to justify their own sinfulness. However, Jesus patiently explained to them why marriage is indissoluble: God made them male and female, God joined them together in holy matrimony (cf. Matthew 19:4, 6). The Pharisees showed us that merely practising the externals of our faith is not enough to resist the fierce temptations of this world. Practising the external requirements of the faith is just the first necessary step. The second step is living the faith in our daily ordinary life. This requires a constant renewal of our hearts and minds to the allegiance of Jesus Christ. Every day, we have to decide who we shall serve. We cannot serve two masters as did the Pharisees. We have to convince ourselves what is most important to us.

**Not vigilant against the pride and stubbornness in our hearts.** The Pharisees could not see the truth and were susceptible to deception. When the long-awaited Saviour appeared in their midst, they could not recognize Him though they were well versed in Scripture. They were so blinded by their pride and complacency that the divine wisdom of the teachings of Jesus which was accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders was simply lost on them. Not only were they jealous of Jesus, they plotted with the chief priests, elders and the scribes to destroy Jesus, the only begotten Son of God whom they professed to worship! Hidden pride resides in our heart when we do not make an all-out effort to really live our priceless faith, to fight temptation and sin with all vigilance, to keep our soul in the state of grace. Pride is entrenched in our heart when we take our salvation for granted, a salvation that was won for us only by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, St Paul warns us: *Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).*

**Allowing the world to control and use up our time.** If God is the most important in our lives, it should be reflected in the time we set aside for God. We do not allow the world to fritter our time away aimlessly. Our time on earth is given to us to prepare for an eternity in heaven. Jesus related the parable of the great feast in which a man gave a great dinner (cf. Luke 14:15-24). Those who were privileged enough to get an invitation, however, gave flimsy excuses not to come: one invitee said he had just bought a piece of land and must go examine it, another said he had just bought some oxen and must go evaluate it, another said he just got married and cannot come. The world will never cease to call us and will always make demands on our time but it is up to us to use our time, a gift from God, in ways that bring forth fruits of eternal value. Jesus teaches us: Do not work for bread that rots but that which endures (cf. John 6:26).

**Not living a prayerful, sacramental way of life.** The Pharisees prayed in order to be seen to be holy. They did not understand a sincere prayer is the conscious effort to put ourselves into the holy presence of God, to render adoration and thanks due to God, to call to our awareness our nothingness and sinfulness in the presence of God, to lift up our needs, supplication for help and to open our hearts to be transformed by His love through the power of His grace working within us. Though Jesus is the author of all graces and certainly in no need of Baptism, He submitted to it for the sake of His Body, the Church, showing us the importance of a sacramental way of life. God's graces come in torrents through the Sacraments which Jesus instituted and entrusted to the Church to be indispensable aids for us in our growth in holiness.

**Conversation with Jesus:** Precious Lord, teach me how to live my faith sincerely. Rid my heart of pride, lukewarmness, worldliness, apathy, spiritual blindness. Help me rise above bondage to the world, its false lights and attractions. Transform my heart and mind, and help me respond to Your call to holiness. Fill me with Your love, Your strength, Your wisdom, Your perseverance, Your humility, Your courage, Your Passion and zeal for God's Kingdom, and Your love for the Father's will. Give me the graces I need to keep my soul always in the state of grace. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.