

REFLECTION FOR TUESDAY OF SECOND WEEK OF LENT

Isa 1:10, 16-22 Matt 23:1-12

At the root of many wrongs in our world is the discrepancy between word and deed. It is the weakness of churches, political parties, individuals. It gives people and institutions split personalities. This was the main fault Christ found with the Pharisees: " They do not practice what they preach and they do what they do to attract admiration from others"

Today there is great emphasis on appearances. The image is everything. People put on a front, but deep down they are not like that at all.

So it was the Scribes and Pharisees. On the outside they appeared to be good and holy people. But inside they are but.

This is a danger that faces all of us. Why do we feel the need to pretend, or to impress others? Because most of us get our self-worth from what others think of us. Hence, in our need for approval, acceptance, and status, we may promote the outer self at the expense of the inner self. But of what use is the appearance without the reality, the image without the substance?

We can not achieve either happiness or holiness as long as we pretend to be what we are not. Many religious people are not saints because they never succeed in being themselves.

If we practice what we preach, if we live by our beliefs, we ourselves will be the first to benefit. But we will also set a good example for others.

People whose religion begins and ends with worship and ritual practices are like soldiers forever manoeuvring, but never getting into action, or footballers forever but never playing competitive game.

What great prophets have said is forgotten, but what heroes and saints have done is still remembered. There can be no happiness for us, as long as the things we believe in are different from the things we do.

Which of us can truthfully say that our deeds match our words?

Do we not sometimes consider ourselves better than others?

Do we not lay down the law for other while excusing ourselves?

Do we not demand sacrifices of others which we don't demand of ourselves?

Are we too not lacking in charity, compassion, and a spirit of service?

The real tragedy of the Scribes and Pharisees wasn't the fact that they had faults, but that they were blind to those faults. Yet many of them were sincere and pious people. But what good is piety if it doesn't make us more humble, more loving, and more compassionate. Piety is no substitute for goodness.

May the faith we profess with our lips, we may believe with our hearts, and practice with our lives.
Fr Patrick.