

A husband and wife were grocery shopping. He picks up a case of beer and puts it in the cart. "What are you doing?" asks the wife. "They're on sale, only \$10 for 24 cans" he replies. "Put them back, we can't afford them," demands the wife. They continue shopping. Later on, she puts a \$20 jar of face cream in the basket. "What are you doing?" asks the husband. "It's my face cream. It makes me look beautiful," replies the wife. He said, "So does 24 cans of beer – and it's half the price!" You can find this man on the floor of aisle 5....

This week it looks like the pew potatoes get to sit back and listen while the priests get a lecture from the Lord. Jesus was pretty hard on the Pharisees and scribes, and by extension, all who exercise authority in the name of God. We seem to be reminded on a rather regular basis that the priests and bishops of today are just as much in need of Jesus' lecture. But note that the text says that Jesus spoke these words to the crowds and to His disciples. So while Jesus pointed out the bad things that the leaders did, He did so that everyone else would not do what they did. Which means that none of us – lay person or priest or bishop – is left off the hook. TOO BAD! And yes, this is like every other sermon I have ever given – do as I say – not as I do! I'm trying to do as I say and not as I do too!!

So what's the real problem here? It's the biggest problem of religion. Hypocrisy. It is so easy for us to look at someone else and see their problem. It's not so easy for us to recognize our own. A small town baker bought his butter one pound at a time from a local farmer. At length, he began to suspect that the farmer was cheating him. He took to weighing the butter each time he bought it and, as he thought, it was always short of a full pound. Indignant, he brought the farmer before the judge with his evidence. "What type of scale do you use?" the judge asked the farmer. "I have no scale," replied the farmer. "Only a set of balances." "And what do you use for a counter-balance when you measure out butter for the baker?" "I use a one-pound loaf of bread – that I buy from the baker," said the farmer.

It's funny. But then not so funny when we realize that every one of us has been caught in something similar at one time or another. And there is just a whole lot in our culture that seems to conspire to turn us into hypocrites.

When he was 6 years old, Johnny was with his father when he was stopped for speeding. His father slipped the officer a \$20 bill with his license. "It's ok, everybody does it," the father told his son.

When Johnny was 10-years old and broke his glasses, he heard his mother call the insurance company and report that they were stolen, so the insurance company would pay for a new pair.

In high school, Johnny's coach showed him how to hold on to an opponent's shirt while throwing a block so the referee wouldn't see it.

When he got to college, he found he could buy answers to some professors' tests or hire certain students to write term papers for him, and he could do this because professors who claimed to be diligent in research and up-to-date in class preparations had not rewritten those exams or given different instructions in years.

So when he was caught cheating and expelled from school, Johnny's parents, teachers, and friends couldn't believe it. Hadn't they taught him the difference between right and wrong? They had – by their example.....(From LECTONAID, Oct-Dec 96, p. 13)

It's a big problem when leaders don't practice what they preach or teach. It's easy to point it out, and there are absolutely no excuses for bad behavior. But as we all know, it is not a problem unique to those who sit in the chair of Moses – church leaders. Everyone who is a parent, teacher, friend, has to struggle to match their deeds with their words.

So what's the solution? Jesus recommends humility. "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted." I love the fact that the word HUMUS – the decayed matter that feeds the roots of plants – comes from the same root that gives rise to the word HUMILITY. It is a wonderful etymology. It helps us to understand that the humiliating events of life, the events that leave 'mud on our face' or that 'make mud of our name,' may create the fertile soil in which something can grow. (Adapted from Parker J. Palmer, LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK: LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF CREATION, p. 103) This is the blessed lesson of those in 12 step programs. They have learned from dealing with the struggle of alcoholism or addiction that God can make great persons from those who are willing to be humble enough to allow God to heal their lives of their brokenness. Sometimes we only seem to learn by being pulled out of the mud by a God who loves us, no matter what. But it requires that we be humble enough to admit that we are in need of God's help.

Not long after he was tapped to co-host the "TODAY SHOW" on the NBC television network in 1976, Tom Brokaw took the occasion of a free afternoon to go shopping. As he meandered through Bloomingdale's, he was feeling quite content with himself. He felt he had reached a career pinnacle after having worked for years at a television station in Omaha and then for NBC in Los Angeles. As he mused, Brokaw suddenly realized that a man nearby was staring at him. Brokaw was certain that he was about to be recognized and applauded for his new celebrity status.

Pointing his finger, the man said, "Tom Brokaw, right?" "Right," responded Brokaw. "You used to do the morning news on KMTV in Omaha, right?" "Right again," said Brokaw, as he prepared for the usual accolades and fanfare that often accrue to the famous. "I recognized you the minute I saw you," said the man. "By the way, whatever happened to you?"

Sometimes just the simple experiences of life can remind us of the fact that we are humus, just the stuff of the earth. Brokaw went on to even greater success, but says that whenever he is tempted to become blinded by his fame, he calls to mind that ego-deflating question: "What ever happened to you?" We probably need someone to ask us that question every day for the rest of our lives. You who are parents usually have it built in with your kids! Kids usually do a pretty good job at keeping their parents humble!

For most of his life, Albert Einstein had the portraits of 2 scientists, Newton and Maxwell, hanging on his wall as role models to inspire him. Toward the end of his life, however, he took them down and replaced them with portraits of Albert Schweitzer and Mahatma Gandhi. He needed new role models, he said – not of success – but of humble service. (Philip Yancey, "Humility's many faces," in CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Dec 4, 2000). It is interesting to me that the reality of the truly great people in the world is that they have chosen a way that serves, and that is how their true greatness is recognized.

Which leads me to my third and final point. Jesus summed up this discussion on hypocrisy and humility with the keystone of His own life – service. "The greatest among you will be your servant." It is what we rightly expect of our church leaders, but it is also what Jesus expects of ALL of His followers. The fact is that there are 2 races going on in this world, and they are headed 180 degrees away from one another. One race is the James Bond race: money, fame, sex, power, the other race is the Mother Teresa race: Service without charge, forgiveness of those who have harmed us, healing those who don't deserve it. The first is the world

race, and we can see how successful its advertisers have been with seducing us. The second race is the kingdom race, toward what we Catholics at least claim to be is real value. The question is not whether we are James Bond or Mother Teresa; the question is in which direction we are heading. Will our motives for our work be any different from the motives of the atheist who lives on our street? Will our tax returns look any different? What about our church and charitable contributions? The number of organizations that are better because we have helped and served in them? Unnerving questions. But if the gospel doesn't unnerve us, we've never really heard it. (Adapted from William J. O'Malley, SJ, BECOMING A CATECHIST: WAYS TO OUTFOX TEENAGE SKEPTICISM, p. 60-61)

Someone said that the service we render others is really the rent we pay for our room on earth. (Sir Wilfred Tomason Genfell, explorer of the Labrador coast). I like that. It's a good reminder that we have been put here – but only temporarily. We'll leave this gospel of Matthew on the Feast of Christ the King in a couple of weeks. And we will hear that famous passage from Matthew about the separation of the sheep and goats == a great harvest theme very much in line with the church's reflection in the month of November. And we will hear again that we will be judged on how well we have served, as Jesus indicates – by our clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, giving drink to the thirsty.

Part of the problem is that we have so often reduced our faith to what we do in here – come to Mass and drop an envelope in a basket. But that's a terrible impoverishment of the LIFE IN CHRIST that we signed up for in Baptism. If we don't understand the whole idea of service, then our Christianity is in need of corrective surgery. (John Westerhof). The problem is that most of us are willing to serve God – but only in an advisory capacity!

Today's gospel is rich in challenge for all of us – church leaders and church goers. But it all boils down to how well we have served in the end.