

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

10/30/11 31 A

-- After my hearing the gospel, I wonder whether the burning question in the heads of many of you is *What in the world are phylacteries?*

That's not a word you come by very often!

-- If you've been to New York City or other places where Orthodox Jews in long coats and hats walk around, you may have seen them. They are the little "boxes" hanging from their hats or belts.

-- The boxes contain small-print copies of parts of scripture, especially the Mosaic law. These are to remind them to carry the law of the Lord in their hearts continually.

-- Jesus had nothing against phylacteries as such. After all, he was an observant Jew. But he did criticize those who would wear them prominently but fail to practice what was in them.

-- Yes, he had little tolerance for those who, when it came to their commitment to God and neighbor, lived by the saying *Don't do as I do; do as I say.*

-- Jesus wasn't the first among God's people to criticize this attitude. The prophets before him criticized such arrogant and hypocritical behavior.

-- Today we heard the prophet Malachi criticize the behavior of the Jewish priests and leaders of his own day. They tended to favor the rich and those in power over the poor—does that sound familiar?

-- They also would sacrifice blemished animals. The fault was not so much the animals themselves but the attitude it expressed: they did not offer their best to the Lord. They gave him their "leftovers," so to speak.

-- There's a great danger that all of us—leaders and people alike—can do that when it comes to the things of the Lord. We give God whatever time we have left over. Some people only make it to Sunday Mass when there's nothing else going on that might possibly interfere.

-- And leaders in the Church are not exempt. We can get so wound up in parish activities or other interests that we fail to make enough time for personal prayer, for example.

-- Even more, we often fail to practice what we preach. We tell people to be patient and fail with our own staff in the parish. We tell people power is not important and then hold on to it ourselves.

-- The sexual abuse crisis forced us to examine our consciences on how we protect young people. I'm not so sure Church leaders have engaged in a similar examination when it comes to how we use power or fail to share power when we should do so.

-- Yes, these scriptures force all of us, in whatever positions we find ourselves in our daily lives, to examine ourselves. None of us perfectly practices what we preach, since we are all subject to sin.

-- So we would do well to nourish the attitude expressed in our psalm today. We ought to seek the Lord's help like a child who is totally dependent upon him.

-- For, as one wise Episcopal priest recently said, *There are no prodigies in the Christian life; all of us are apprentices.* In other words, living an authentically Christian life is a learning process for all of us, no matter what position we may have and no matter how old we get.

-- May we all seek to follow the Lord in all humility, trusting in God's protection, but also seeking to follow him in a more faithful and authentic manner.