

After listening to our gospel today, we tempted to wonder whether Jesus woke up on the wrong side of the bed. What we hear today is a continuation of what is sometimes referred to as the seven woes. Jesus states repeatedly, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees." The woes are a reverse of the beatitudes in chapter 5.

A woe is a condemnation or even a curse for a hypocritical way of living. The Scribes and Pharisees are professing to live one way, but in reality, they do something very different. If they do not repent, they stand in danger of facing God's judgment.

Today we hear the sixth and seventh woes. The religious leaders pretend to be virtuous on the outside, but they are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing on the inside. Even worse, they are capable of spreading their corruption to others.

Jesus' words today cause me to reflect on my own life. Anyone in a position of leadership better regularly examine his conscience. Obviously, however, His words are not just for leaders. All Christians are leaders in the sense that they are called to bear witness to the life, suffering, death, and Resurrection of Christ before others.

Here are just a few questions we can ask ourselves on a regular basis to avoid the conduct that Jesus found so displeasing:

- Do I practice what I preach?
- Do I perform religious actions just to impress others or to obtain God's approval?
- Do I seek places of honor?
- Do I emphasize lesser matters to the neglect of justice, mercy, and fidelity?
- What is my motivation for doing something good?

One of the key ways to avoid falling into the hypocritical track is regular prayer – having to examine our motivations and actions before God, and regular confession – to confess we are sinners.

May we ask the Lord to be people of integrity with good, clean hearts, and for actions that express our hearts. In doing so, we will avoid the displeasing actions pointed out by Jesus in today's gospel.