

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“The scribes and Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example”.
(Matt. 23, 1)

The ‘Chair of Moses’ refers to the juridical office of Moses, who was judge for the people of God. The poor guy had to listen to so many cases he needed to sit down, hence the ‘seat’, or ‘chair’ of Moses. His juridical role, being too much for one person to handle, was shared with others: the beginning of the Levitical priesthood.

In Jesus’ day it was the High Priest and the Pharisees who sat ‘in the chair of Moses.’

Replica of the chair of Moses, Korazim, Israel

If you came to Mass the past few Sundays, you would have heard Jesus lambasting the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. How is it that he now tells us in today’s Gospel to follow their teachings?

Recent discovery of an ancient Hebrew manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew, written in 1380 by a Spaniard, Shem Tob ben Isaac, sheds light on what Jesus meant. The Hebrew text of Matthew reads:

*“Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and Sages sit, and now, all which **HE** (Moses) will say unto you-keep and do; but **THEIR** ordinances and deeds do not do, because **THEY** say and do not.”*

Our modern English translation loses the nuance between what HE (Moses) says and what THEY (the religious leaders) say and do. By using the singular –“**He will say**,” Jesus’ hearers are directed to keep and do whatever Moses (i.e. the Law, the Torah) says to them, but NOT to follow the ordinances and deeds of the religious leaders of the day.

In plain English, actions speak louder than words. This Gospel passage speaks directly to me, a priest, and a ‘religious leader’. But it is also proclaimed in the hearing of all of us here today, who are, by Baptism, a priestly people. As individuals and as a community, we have been called by God to be guides for our generation.

Do we pay lip service to the Gospel, but our lives portray something else? Are we nominally Christian, but with no difference in our actions/behavior to others who are not?

What difference has the Gospel made in our lives? In the lives of our children?

It’s not the habit (the outward appearance) that makes the monk!

All of us, in one way or another, sit on the chair of Moses. Are we authentic or phony? Are we real or fake?

What’s in your heart?