

# *The Role of Social Conscience*

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The Scripture readings for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time invite us to reflect on how we conduct ourselves in a society of contradictory values. The Gospel, which means good news might not be really good news for those, who do not want to reform their lives. Therefore, embracing the good news and choosing to live by its values irritates those who want to live their old way. The righteous person prickles the conscience of his/her fellow men and women. The reading says, “He is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violation of our trainings.” We live in the age of relative values, the moral boundaries blurred “we go along to get along.” If we are true to our Christian call and be like Christ, being a sign of contradiction and moral irritants should be part of the package. However, there is also the danger we turn to judgmental and self-righteous, acting as moral police. In this scenario we could have the martyr complex.

Integrating the Gospel values means encountering Christ through discernment and humility. St. James in the second readings says, “The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits...” These values are supposed to be reflecting in our own lives and lifestyle. Therefore, we become empathic and pastoral towards others. Our words and teaching become secondary to what we project in our life as true witnesses of the good news.

Jesus became irritant to those who thought that they were on the right side of God, controlling his will. Jesus did not have patience with them. In the Gospel of Matthew 23, Jesus seemed to have a bad day with the scribes and Pharisees. As they were irritated by his actions of mercy and compassion, Jesus seemed to have lost his patience with them too. His “woe to you” expression to them was harsh. For example, we read, “You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter... You are like whitewashed tombs... serpents, you brood of vipers.” In the Gospel reading Jesus is telling his disciples about consequence of clash of values: “The Son of Man is to be handed over and they will kill him.” Jesus’ action and words did not give peace to those acting “holier than thou.”

We too contradict ourselves as well. Our words and actions are not congruent. In today’s reading, pointing to such contradictions St. James says, “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make wars within your members?” Self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement do not have room if we truly encounter Jesus and embrace the gospel values. The childlike innocence and simplicity what Jesus wants us to emulate. Jesus prickled the social conscience of his time, especially relating to those on social religious peripheries. It is important that we reflect and discern this aspect of Jesus’ call for us.