



**Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**† Sunday 5th November 2017**

In England and Wales Cycle of Prayer:  
Justice and Peace in the World and All the Victims of War  
Keynote: Ministry of Service

**Prophet Malachi 1: 14- 2: 2, 8-10**

This prophet – a messenger from the Lord God – writing some 500 years before Christ, accuses the Temple Priests of abusing their position. Their crimes include, the offering of blind and lame animals in sacrifice in the Temple, useless animals not fit for such a religious purpose, and one may assume keeping the best animals and their meat for their own table. The second accusation is that of the crime of false teaching. *'You have caused many to stumble by your teaching,'* the prophet says, *'You have destroyed the covenant.'* The Lord God through Malachi, urges them to listen to this warning and take it to heart, or, *'I will send the curse on you and curse your very blessing. You have strayed from the way... you have not kept to my paths but have shown partiality in your administration.'* This Old Testament warning might be hearkened to by anyone in authority or owing service to others today. For all of us, of whatever station or position in life, it is a call for integrity in service.

**Responsorial Psalm 130 [131]** – A pilgrimage song of trust and serenity

**First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians 2: 7-9, 13**

As we continue with our readings from the letter of Paul, we have in contrast to the bad ministers of the temple, a touching and gentle view of the apostle himself. As the apostle – the messenger sent by the Lord – Paul sees himself in a caring role, *'Like a mother feeding and looking after her own children, we felt so devoted and protective towards you, and had come to love you so much. That we were eager to hand over to you not only the Good News but our whole lives as well.'* In the midst of public criticism of some priests today, we should not lose sight of the caring ministry and the total dedication of the true servants of the gospel who minister with integrity and devoted love, but too often may quietly go unnoticed.

**Gospel according to Matthew 23: 1-12**

Following the contest in last week's gospel between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, today we have another confrontation this time Jesus speaks of the role of these Pharisees who sit on the chair of Moses. Their abuse of position prompts Jesus to tell his listeners, *'Listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practice what they preach... Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats... and being greeted obsequiously in the market.'* Instead Christ's disciples he says, *'Must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, you have only one Master, and you are all brothers (and sisters)... the greatest among you must be your servant.'* For the disciples of the Lord are called to walk humbly in service and to live according to the gospel.