

## SERMON NOTES

Sixth Sunday of Great Lent  
Advent

Synaxis Gospel  
Matthew 22:34-23:39

### THE DEADLY DANGER OF HYPOCRISY

#### INTRODUCTION

During the past weeks, we have been following the last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. Next week will mark His arrival on Palm Sunday, but in order to review His last days in Jerusalem, our reading skips ahead to a few days before His crucifixion. Since His arrival in the capital, conflict with the religious authorities has become intense. The religious rulers<sup>1</sup> can hardly contain their hatred for Jesus, and first one group, and then another, seek to find some excuse for His arrest by entrapping Him in some incriminating statement.

The Sadducees have just tried to stump Jesus with a question dealing with the resurrection of the dead. Jesus easily showed them from the writings of Moses, whom they revered, that the Sadducees' position concerning the afterlife demonstrated an ignorance of the Torah (the five books of Moses). In showing that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," He proved that the Torah teaches life after death. The crowds were delighted and amazed. Therefore, the Pharisees put their heads together to come up with something subtle in their area of expertise that would discredit Him, and demonstrate their own intellectual superiority over Him in the eyes of the people.

#### SYNAXIS READING

Matthew 22:34-23:39

*But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together.*

*And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL*

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<sup>1</sup> Two major religious sects are mentioned in the New Testament, and they were usually at odds with each other. The ruling priests belonged to the party of the Sadducees. They did not believe in either the oral law or the afterlife. The other sect, the Pharisees, believed in both. However, they were united in their opposition to Jesus.

*YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”*

*Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET”’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.*

*Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.*

*And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi.*

*But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is Christ.*

*But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*

*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from*

*men [people]; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.*

*[Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.]*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

*Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men; which is more important the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?*

*And 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him that dwells within it. And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him Who sits upon it.*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside*

*appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets.*

*Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.*

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' "*

## NOTES

**But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together.**

The word translated 'silence,' means literally to be muzzled. The Sadducees were unable to say a word; they were completely speechless.

Earlier in the day, Jesus had routed the Pharisees when they tried to trick Him into incriminating Himself with a question about taxes. Now they returned again with another question.

And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Apparently, it was a matter of debate among the scholars as to which commandment was more important. Even today’s Christian theologians, knowing Jesus’ reply, debate whether love of God leads to love of man; or love of man leads to love of God.

The first commandment is found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and is one of the Ten Commandments. The second is found in Leviticus 19:18. It was thought that the Ten Commandments were in a sense the summary of the Mosaic Law. They legislated man’s duty to God and man’s duty to his fellowman. In the entire Mosaic Code, the command to ‘love’ is found only with reference to God and one’s neighbor (including foreigners). Jesus brought the two commands together as the greatest. All the rest of the Law is derived from these two.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, “The son of David.”

Matthew and Mark recount this episode a little differently. In Mark’s account, Jesus is teaching the crowd on this issue. Here, He is speaking directly to the Pharisees in the crowd. This is not a problem; it is just a matter of the individual writer’s presentation of the teaching.

**Please see the notes on the following passage (paralleled in Mark 12) for  
“The Fifth Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross”**

He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET”’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

This question was put to the Pharisees to force them to really think about the person of the Christ. The only One David (the king) could properly call “My Lord” was God Himself. Therefore for Christ to be David’s son and God simultaneously, it required the incarnation of God.

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

‘Moses’ chair’ is a metaphor for the responsibility of teaching and judging concerning Moses’ Law. The scribes (lawyers) and the Pharisees have taken on this responsibility, and, therefore, must be obeyed. However, though they teach the Law, they are hypocrites and do not follow their own teaching. Jesus was generalizing. We know from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that *some* Pharisees really did try to follow the Law and were very proud of themselves.

And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.

This probably refers to the myriad of laws that the Pharisees developed to protect the Law. It was called "putting a hedge around the Torah." For example to make sure that no work was done on the Sabbath, they defined even rubbing grain in your hands before eating it as threshing. This is why Jesus' disciples were accused of breaking the Law in Mark 2. They were only breaking the Pharisee's tradition that protected the Sabbath—and even then only because they were in need of food.

That the scribes and Pharisees were creating intolerable burdens for the people did not bother them at all. They themselves did not carry the burdens. Jesus is using hyperbole.

**Please see the notes on the following passage (paralleled in Mark 12) for  
"The Fifth Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross"**

But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi.

The phylacteries are small leather black boxes tied to the left arm and the forehead, usually for times of prayer. They contained small slips of parchment on which portions<sup>2</sup> of the Law were written. This custom is a literal interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

*And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:*

*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

*And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.*

*And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

The 'tassels of their garments' were tassels of blue ribbons and threads attached to the four corners of their outer garment (a long rectangular shaped coat). They were commanded to wear them as a reminder to keep God's Law.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently the Pharisees were making their phylacteries and tassels very prominent for a show of piety. They wanted honor and to be greeted in a deferential way not accorded others.

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who

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<sup>2</sup> The Scripture portions were: Exodus 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. Orthodox Jews still maintain this practice.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 15:38-39.

is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

'Rabbi' is a Hebrew title for teacher.

Christians are brothers and sisters; we are all equal in prominence to each other, all servants of Christ and of each other. Only the Triune God should be exalted in our midst. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher, God is our Father, and Jesus Christ is our Master and Lord.

In our Church,<sup>4</sup> we use titles, but they should never be seen as possessed by or distinguishing the man, but as recognition of the One Who directs the man in His service. Ideally, our heavenly Father, by the Holy Spirit of Christ, directs the Der Hayr, the Hayr Soorp, His Eminence, and His Holiness in their humble service to the flock of which they are equal members and which they represent before the Throne of Grace. The titles belong only to God.

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men [people]; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

**This is the first of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

The Pharisees were respected for their knowledge and their position in the community. Perhaps the Pharisees' opposition to Jesus caused many of those in the crowd to distrust Him and thus not acknowledge the true King. The scribes and Pharisees thus were barring the way for others to enter the kingdom of heaven.

[Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.]

This verse is not found in the early manuscripts of Matthew and may have been inserted by a copyist from the parallel passage in Mark 12. **See the notes for "The Fifth Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross"**

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

**This is the second of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

"About on sea and land" is just an expression for *everywhere*.

*Proselyte* here means a convert to the Jewish religion in the Pharisaic manner of practicing it. True converts are often more dedicated than those born to a religion. Thus, the converts to Pharisaic Judaism would be even less reachable by the truth than the original Pharisee.

"Son of hell" means someone characterized by hell. It could mean something like our *hellish*. Or more likely, someone doomed because of his opposition to God. Twice the son of hell would then mean he is twice as bad.

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<sup>4</sup> For New Testament Church examples of the use of titles see 2 John 1:1, 5.

**For a discussion of the making of oaths in the next verses, please see the notes for  
"The Second Sunday of Great Lent -Expulsion"**

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men; which is more important the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And 'Whoever swears by the altar that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him that dwells within it. And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him Who sits upon it.

**This is the third of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

In chapter 5 of his Gospel, Matthew recorded that Jesus prohibited the use of this kind of oath language. The lawyers were making vows unenforceable if the wrong words, according to them, had been used during the making of the oath. Thus they were allowing contracts to be broken by making loopholes in the Law. Jesus condemns them for this.

'Blind guides' refers to the danger in which the scribes and Pharisees put themselves as well as those depending upon their leadership.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

**This is the fourth of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

This is the center of the seven woes. It points up the tragic failure of the Pharisees and their interpretation and teaching of the Law. This is the root cause of all their other failures that have brought Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon them. In all their study of the Law, they have missed what it is truly all about, what it is meant to bring about in the community—justice and mercy and faithfulness. This is what God truly desires from His worshippers for one another. All the rest is simply a means to that end.

Both gnats and camels were unclean and so could not be eaten under the law. Wine was strained to remove any gnats that might have fallen in. To do that but eat a camel was ridiculous.

The scribes and Pharisees had made the fine points of the Law to be the object of the law, an end in itself. God's purpose was totally ignored.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-

indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

**This is the fifth of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

The image of filthy dishes nicely washed on the outside but nasty on the inside is a disgusting picture of what God sees when he looks at hypocrites. Who would want to use them! If they cleaned up their hearts and minds, their outer actions would be pure as well.

“The accusation charges the scribes and Pharisees with economic and sexual sins (cf. Amos 2:6-8).”<sup>5</sup>

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

**This is the sixth of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

Touching dead bodies made a Jew ritually unclean and therefore prohibited him from participating in the Temple services. The hypocrisy and lawlessness that characterizes the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees makes them totally unfit to even enter the Temple.

Jesus chastises those who pride themselves in the knowledge of the Law as being actually lawless themselves.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets.

**This is the last of seven woes pronounced by Jesus on His adversaries.**

Although the scribes and the Pharisees honored the prophets of old—after the prophets were dead—they were in fact of the same stripe as those who had killed the prophets.

How did the scribes and Pharisees testify against themselves? By referring to those who had killed the prophets as “our fathers” they were in fact calling themselves *the sons of those who murdered the prophets*. Just as the proselyte in the second woe was called *son of hell* because the opposition to God that doomed to hell characterized him; so the scribes and Pharisees are *sons of their fathers* in the sense that they are characterized by those who murdered the prophets. The scribes and Pharisees would have understood this play on words.

Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?

There is the idea that God has a certain limit to wickedness; after the limit is reached, His wrath will fall. The scribes’ and Pharisees’ sinfulness will bring the level of the wickedness of their

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<sup>5</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) p. 298.

fathers up to the limit. Within forty years after these words were spoken, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed and the people massacred or scattered in exile.

John the Baptist called the Pharisees “you brood of vipers” in Matthew 3:7 and called them to repentance. They were the brood of vipers, the sons of their forefathers who murdered the prophets. Repentance could be their only escape, but they rejected it.

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

These are the last words that Jesus spoke to the scribes and Pharisees before His trial.

Jesus here speaks as the incarnate God that He is. **He** will send **His** servants with **His** Divine message as **He** did in the days of the Old Testament and they will be treated as the prophets were treated—they will be persecuted and killed. This was fulfilled in the suffering of the Disciples and Apostles, who were sent not only to the Jews but also throughout the world, including Armenia.

Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, was slain by his brother Cain.<sup>6</sup> A prophet named Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, was the writer of the Old Testament book of Zachariah. We are not told in the Old Testament how he died. All the slain prophets were bracketed by these two holy men.

The altar was in the courtyard of the Temple.

As mentioned above, judgment would soon fall on the leaders of the Jews and on all who trusted and followed them. It would happen to their generation. In AD 70, Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans and the Temple was destroyed. Only the Wailing Wall, a portion of the outermost wall of the courtyard, remains to this day.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’ ”

Jerusalem, as the capital and leading city of the Jewish people, represented the nation. They have rejected their King and Jesus foresees their destruction that lies ahead in less than forty years.

Jesus used the beautiful figure of a mother hen, who gathers her little chicks under her wings to protect them and keep them safe, to illustrate His great concern for the Jews’ well-being. Over the centuries, God had called to the Hebrews to come under His wings, but they refused. It was not His will that they perish, but they had brought judgment upon themselves in rejecting God and His Christ, their only hope of salvation.

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<sup>6</sup> Genesis 4.

“Your house is being left to you desolate,” could refer to the fact that God was leaving them or it could be pointing to the desolation that was soon to fall, perhaps both.

From this point on, He would no longer teach the crowds, but only His disciples, privately.

When He rode into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, the crowds had shouted, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.” However, they would soon be shouting, “Crucify Him.” The next time that they say, “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord,” will be at His Second Coming when He will come with the angels of Heaven to take His kingdom.

## APPLICATION

Not long ago in an Armenian youth meeting, the question was asked, “Who are the Chosen People?” One young man responded, “The Armenians.” And in a sense, he was correct. The Chosen People of God are those He has called and selected to serve Him in true obedience. They were chosen to witness to the glorious Truth of God to all nations and, in doing so, become a blessing to all mankind. In the Old Testament the Chosen People were the Israelites, the remnant of which we know as the Jews. By the days of the New Testament, most of the Jews had failed miserably as the Chosen People.

In our reading for today, we have seen the state of the religious leadership of the Jews, the Chosen People, in Jesus’ day. They were hypocrites. They pretended to serve God, but in reality they served only their pride, their own self-centered needs to be respected and to be put on a pedestal by their people. While supposedly caring for the Law of God and appearing righteous to others, inwardly they were lawless and broke every commandment of God. Their murderous hatred of the One Who exposed their true self finally led to their successful efforts to have Him crucified. Their final days ended in their own massacre, and their people scattered in other lands for 2000 years. They were cut off from the special blessing of God. God then extended the Chosen status to other peoples.

The disciples of Jesus were Jews, of course, but they were a relatively small band compared to their people as a whole. After the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, they were sent out to evangelize the world, to take the good news of the Gospel to every land, to make disciples of the Gentiles who would serve God in spirit and in truth. Two came to Armenia.

Thaddeus and Bartholomew taught those of our people who would listen that there is One true God, that He loves us and provided for our salvation by His becoming a Man, the Christ, to pay our sin penalty by dying on the Cross in our place. They taught that our repentant response to this great love must be love in return. We must love our God with all our heart, mind, and strength. And we must love our neighbor as He loved us.

Three hundred years after Thaddeus and Bartholomew brought the Gospel; the tiny band of Armenian Christians was still totally surrounded by a pagan culture that threatened their very existence. Then God touched the heart of a young prince. His name was Gregory. We all know his story, his faith, his suffering in the pit at the hands of T’rdat, the pagan king of the Armenians. We know of the miraculous conversion of the king and the subsequent making of the first Christian nation in circa AD 301 from a land of idol

worshippers. Those Armenians who became believers in Christ became members of the Chosen People and they, too, became missionaries to carry the Gospel to other lands.

Now 1700 years later, we find ourselves scattered around the world, surrounded by spiritual paganism. In our ranks, we find apathy; our churches are filled to overflowing only on a Sunday like Easter. On other Sundays, only a tiny fraction of our people shows up to worship God in the Holy Badarak. There are multiplied thousands of Armenians in California alone, how many are in Church today? How many of our youth and young people regularly attend? How many of our young men and women even think religion is relevant? Why is this?

Perhaps we should look at our reading for today and ask ourselves if we are different from the people that Jesus addressed His last week before He died. In the privacy of our own hearts, do we dare take a good look at ourselves? What does God see?

The religious leaders of Jesus day were experts in the Holy Scriptures, but they missed God's point and His will contained in them. How expert are we in the study of His Holy Word, and do we really want to know what His will for is us? Or are we only interested in looking good to others?

Do we really care if others come to understand what Christ has done for us on the Cross? Or, are we only interested in our culture and the source of pride it supplies? Is the Holy Badarak a true worship experience for us, from which we come away recommitted to serve God? Or is it simply something that is a part of our cultural duty?

The scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites, who only pretended to love and serve God. They brought death and Hell upon themselves and those they blindly led in the same path. Are we like them?

The hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees led them to a deadly future. It ended in the withdrawal of God from them and their people who trusted in their leadership. It ended in their being cut off as chosen servants of God. Let us not follow their example. Let us instead open our hearts to His cleansing. Let us love Him with all our heart, mind, and strength. The world will then witness a renewed Armenian Church, once again on fire with the faith that turns entire nations to God.