

Devotional—day 13

"Alas for You"

Alas, Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees,
Hypocrites that you be,
Searching for souls and fools to forsake them,
You travel the land, you scour the sea;
Then when you've got your converts,
You make them twice as fit for hell
As you are yourselves.

Alas, Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees,
Hypocrites that you are;
Sure that the kingdom of heaven awaits you.
You will not venture half so far.
Other men who might enter the gates
You keep from passing through;
Drag them down with you.

You snakes, you viper's brood,
You cannot escape being devil's food
I send you prophets and I send you preachers;
Sages in rags and ages of teachers.
Nothing can mar your mood.

Hypocrites!

Alas, alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees,
Hypocrites to a man;
Sons of the dogs who murdered the prophets,
Finishing off what you fathers began.
You don't have time to scorn or to scoff.
It's getting very late.
Vengeance doesn't wait.

Blind guides!
Blind fools!
The blood you've spilt
On you will fall.
This nation, this generation
Shall bear the guilt of it all!

Alas, Alas, Alas for you, blind fools!

Behind the Music....

"Alas for You" is a moment of anger and frustration for Jesus, almost despair, and it triggers a lot of the events that follow. It is meant to be the Godspellian equivalent of the expulsion of the Money Changers from the temple. - *Stephen Schwartz*

Matthew 23:13-39 (NIV)

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. **15** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. **16** Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' **17** You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? **18** You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' **19** You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? **20** Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. **21** And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. **22** And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. **23** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. **24** You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. **25** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. **26** Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. **27** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. **28** In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. **29** Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. **30** And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' **31** So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. **32** Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! **33** You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

34 "Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. **35** And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **36** I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. **37** O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **38** Look, your house is left to you desolate. **39** For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

The 7 Woes:

Only Matthew gives all seven woes. Luke restrains himself to but three (less a bit), and Mark joins Luke and Matthew only in bemoaning some of the Pharisee's activities. Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites and guilty of, according to Matthew's author, the following:

1. They were acting as stumbling blocks, not ushers, into the kingdom of heaven.
2. They were effective missionaries, but created more blind guides and hypocrites.
3. The first of two types of bound/unbound oaths.
4. The second of two types of oaths. Jesus' point is that oaths are unworthy and unnecessary, and that to say that swearing on the Temple is somehow not swearing on the Father is an empty argument.
5. They tithed even of the herbs of their gardens, yet scrimped on giving mercy, and justice, and honesty.
6. While they are beautifully moral and upright in appearance, their hearts manufacture grievous sin.
7. Though they bewail their forefathers' murder of the just and the prophets, they stand ready to do it all over again, and both they and Jesus knows that he, Jesus, is their intended victim.

A Reflection:

When I look at the man in the mirror, he appears very afraid that he is guilty of many of these forms of hypocrisy and unworthiness (and more). In some ways, he doesn't even live up to the outward appearances of the Pharisees.

Matthew's author is here again going for the gusto! John doesn't seem to know about it, and while Mark and Luke share the introduction that precedes this, only Luke has two-and-a-half of the seven. Which is not to say that the seven (maybe five, given the status of oaths then vs. now) are not just as robust, if not more so, now as opposed to then. We probably have invented ways to make these e-woes, operating at the speed of light.

Think on, however, how the Pharisees -- especially the majority of the sect who were trying to be good Jews -- knew that they could never keep the Law. That they were cursed before God in their imperfection. And here came this carpenter from the boonies, Nazareth -- remember Phillip, and "what good can come from Nazareth?" -- saying that He had the solution. He kept on talking about justice and mercy, not tithes of dill and anise. He never said, "As Rabbi Schmoe the elder taught ...," because he didn't need to.

Those like Nicodemus and Joseph who heard and believed were at the head of the throng who accept Jesus' commandments. We are bringing up the end of the line, today. We are called, however, to be in the middle of an ever-widening array of humanity to follow Him.

Almighty and ever-living God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for our earthly family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Time for personal reflection (Day 13):

Main Entry: **hyp-o-crite**

Pronunciation: 'hi-p&-"krit

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English *ypocrite*, from Old French, from Late Latin *hypocrita*, from Greek *hypokritēs* actor, hypocrite, from *hypokrinesthai*

: **a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion**

Matthew 23:1 reads, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples..." Chapter 23 therefore is not only addressed to the Pharisees, but to the crowd and his disciples. Why would Jesus direct this warning to his disciples and lay citizens?

"Hypocrite" is such a powerful word that it has no synonym or antonym. What do I think of when I hear the word "hypocrite?"

In the first woe (Matthew 23:13), Jesus accuses the "hypocrites" of being stumbling blocks for other believers. Who have I witnessed in my life that has caused me to stumble or back-slide in my walk due to their hypocrisy?

What attitudes or actions might I be displaying that may present me as hypocritical to others—causing them to stumble or back-slide?

What do I need to do to ensure that I do not present myself as a hypocrite to those I meet on this tour as well as to my fellow cast and crew members?