

Thurs., Dec. 8, 2011

Nancy Hammond, Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Advancement and Marketing

Scripture

Matthew 23:13-26

¹³"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them. ¹⁵Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

¹⁶"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.' ¹⁷You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? ¹⁸And you say, 'Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound by the oath.' ¹⁹How blind you are! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; ²¹and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it; ²²and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it.

²³"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel! ²⁵"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

Devotional

The season of Advent is an extremely busy time within most families. The shopping, the wrapping, the decorating, the baking, the cooking, the cleaning can be overwhelming! For me, it's easy to become totally consumed with making the house look "just right" before the friends and the family arrive to celebrate Christmas. I don't know about you, but I am always glad that my Christmas guests will NOT be looking inside my closets and cupboards when they come to visit. Even though I make sure that the house is clean and nicely decorated, I don't usually find the time or make it a priority to clean behind the closed doors of the cabinets!

This passage from Matthew's Gospel reminds us that our spiritual lives suffer from this same confusion. We focus on the exterior appearances in our own lives, in the lives of others, and in our preparations for Christmas, while neglecting the inside matters of the heart. We are surprised by these words from Matthew's gospel: ²⁵" Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the

outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.”

Before we focus on the outside and the wrongs of others, we have to focus on the inside and clean our hearts for the Advent journey. My hope for this Christmas season is that we will make the time to attend to the “inside of the cup” and focus on the fruits of the Spirit which will lead to a Christmas season that is meaningful and joyful.

Prayer

Holy God, thank you for the time of preparation that Advent provides for us. Help us to focus our attention on the inside of the cup, preparing our hearts and lives once again for the blessing of Christ's birth. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.