

## 31 Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) – Follow the Leader

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Growing up, I used to play a game called “follow the leader”, if you are not familiar with it, the game consists of having a leader and then a line of kids behind the leader (the more the merrier), whatever the leader did, you did. If the leader jumped, you jumped, if the leader ran, you ran until there were things that the leader did that you missed or couldn't do, then the last kid standing became the new leader. I remember playing and being very focused and attentive, I always wanted to win but never wanted to lead, I thought it was a lot of pressure to be creative and figure out ways to make the game fun and not repetitious. Whenever I won, I was the boring leader, because I just did what everyone else did be the leader. This reminds me of what it is to be a leader.

Leadership is a huge professional development industry. We study how to be better leaders, the difference between executive leaders and managerial leaders, we ask are leaders born or are they made? all because to be a good leader is a tough task. One that can have a major impact on our lives and as a society we can't function well without leaders. Yet we always find ways to challenge our leaders. The prophet Malachi seems to be no exception.

The prophet is really showing to be displeased with the spiritual leaders (priests) of his time. He feels that they are not listening to the word of God, they are not just, they are leading people away from God and thus are violating the covenant. They are to be the spiritual leaders, to lead by example yet they are forgetting their duties as leaders, as God's representatives. Malachi was a prophet during the rebuilt of the Jerusalem temple, when the people of Israel should have been more focused on living up to the covenant. When the Babylonian exile was still fresh in their minds, the priests, and spiritual leaders were expected to do better. In the gospel, Jesus goes even further and denounces the work of the scribes and Pharisees as spiritual leaders. He states that they are abusing their powers, they are not leading by example and were just looking for recognition, they were playing the game follow the leader by giving instructions as to what to do while sitting down. Yet, Jesus encouraged the disciples to do as the leaders were saying and not to follow their actions. **In a way he saw a benefit to playing follow the leader...**

Some might consider these leaders transactional leaders. Transactional leaders are those leaders that are only focused on the transaction, only focused on getting things done, only focused on the task at hand but not about the person doing the task. On the other hand, we find St. Paul writing a letter to the people in Thessalonica, which represents the opposite. In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul demonstrated what a truly good leader and spiritual leader should be like. He expresses that he went to them to share the good news **with affection**. Paul **sacrificed his life** to share the gospel and opposite to the scribes and

Pharisees, he expressly states that he **does not want to be a burden to them**. He goes to the extent of sharing his life, so that the Thessalonians can receive the word of God that would transform them. This might be described by some as **transformational leadership**. Leadership that leads to a change, a true transformation, leadership that is not only worried about results, task or transaction but is concern for the person and the transformation in the person.

You might say, well I am not a spiritual leader, and I am not a priest, so this doesn't apply to me... **Well think again**... when we are baptized, we are baptized, priest, prophets, and kings. We are not ministerial priests, but we participate in Jesus' priesthood to the expectation of sacrificing ourselves to God daily. As a prophet just like Malachi, you are called to announce and denounce the good news, the gospel with words and mostly with actions. As a king you are called to lead by serving those in your circle of influence. As a priest, prophet, and king you are called to be a leader, to lead your family, your friends, your work, your community, your church, your circle of influence to be an example. So... **What kind of leader are you a transactional leader or a transformational leader?**

We are called to be transformational leaders but how? Simply follow the leader... let's play a game of follow the leader, but not with any leader, with the true and only leader. In the game follow the leader, you are to emulate the leader, to follow every step, to focus, to be attentive, to have the goal of becoming the next leader. Jesus wants us to follow his lead and he wants us to participate, to collaborate with his leadership, he wants to lead through you. He wants you to be transformational, that everyone you encounter is transformed even if you don't know it. For you to be transformational, for him to be leading through you, for him to transform through you, you need to allow him **to be in you, to transform you**.

Think about the apostle Paul, he was transformative, his presence, his letters, his messages, his actions, and it all started with a conversion, **a transformation in his life, he needed to change to be the change**, he is the first to tell you that he needs to diminish so that God grows. God gave us a transformational mechanism; he gave us the Eucharist. The eucharist allows us to be in communion with God, it allows us to receive God's divinity and be transformed so that eventually we can say it is no longer I but Christ who lives in me. That is the ultimate point of transformation, we are all called to be leaders, but not just any leader, we are called to be transformational leaders. Let us allow the eucharist to transform us so that we can allow him to transform others through us.

I invite us all to play follow the leader, and to let **him lead us** to calvary the place of our transformation... if you have never played follow the leader before or if you have played it many times, I can guarantee that you will never play or have played **with a leader like this one**.