

THE WORD OF GOD: Choosing Discipleship

Lesson 20. Sunday of Advent

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: Matthew 22:34-23:39

Prepare Ahead: The background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud and shared verbally.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

Matthew 22:37

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

Sunday of Advent (Matthew 22:34-23:39)

22:³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying:

⁴⁴ ‘The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’?

⁴⁵ If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

23:¹ Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. ⁴ For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. ⁵ But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

⁶ They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ ⁸ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

⁹ Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. ¹⁰ And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

¹³ “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

¹⁴ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

¹⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

¹⁶ "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' ¹⁷ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ¹⁸ And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' ¹⁹ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? ²⁰ Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. ²¹ He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. ²² And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. ²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

³¹ "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. ³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

³⁴ Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, 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, ³⁵ that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

³⁷ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate; ³⁹ for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'"

Questions:

1. *Why do you think the lawyer came up with the question, "Which is the greatest commandment?" to test Jesus? How does Jesus respond?*
2. *Why would Jesus ask the Pharisees such a question in verse 42? What is He trying to get at?*
3. *After seeing that the scribes and Pharisees could not answer Him (verses 42-46), Jesus speaks to the crowds and His disciples. What are some of the main points Jesus speaks of (verses 2-36)?*
4. *What does Jesus mean when He speaks of "whitewashed tombs" in verse 27? Have you or someone you know ever lived a life like this?*
5. *What are some of Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees and scribes? Can you see any similarities with religious leaders today?*
6. *In the concluding verses, Jesus refers to Himself as a "hen who gathers together her chicks beneath her wings" (verse 37). What is He speaking about? How should we understand that in our own lives?*
7. *Why would we call this Sunday "The Sunday of Advent"?*

For the Teacher

Background:

The *Sunday of Advent*, the Last Sunday of Lent, reminds us of the end of the present order of the world, the second coming of the Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment and the creation of a new earth and a new heaven.

The Gospel for Matins (Morning Service) according to St. Mark articulates Jesus' prophecy about the future end times. Jesus gave His followers a prophetic picture of the end times, including events leading up to it. He also talked about future events connected with His return to earth to judge all people. Jesus predicted both near and distant events without putting them in chronological order. Jesus warns His followers about the future to provide them with a guide to live by glorifying God in the present age to prepare for the future fulfillment of the Kingdom. Many predictions Jesus made in this passage have not yet been fulfilled, but they were made to help the faithful remain spiritually alert and prepared at all times as the Church eagerly waits for His Second Coming.

Questions:

1. **Why do you think the lawyer came up with the question, "Which is the greatest commandment?" to test Jesus? How does Jesus respond?**

The Pharisees had found 613 commandments in the Scriptures and debated about which one was central. It would have been easy for the lawyer to contradict Jesus's answer if it was about fasting, prayer or some other religious ritual. However, Christ's answer sets forth the first (Deuteronomy 6:5) and the second (Leviticus 19:18), which constitute the grand summary of the Law and, by fulfilling these two commands, a person keeps all the other commandments. Though the lawyer has come with malice to test the Lord, we know from St. Mark's account that this man is converted by Christ's answer (Mk 12:28-34).

Though the lawyer asks for only one commandment, Christ, in His answer, gives a second commandment too. This second commandment must be understood as written: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (verse 39), or more clearly, "as being yourself." It is often misinterpreted, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself," which destroys the force of the statement. How much we love ourselves is not the standard by which Christ is calling us to love others. Rather, we are called to love our neighbor as being of the same nature as we ourselves are, as being created in God's image and likeness just as we are. As the Fathers teach, we find our true self in loving our neighbor.

2. **Why would Jesus ask the Pharisees such a question in verse 42? What is He trying to get at?**

Christ asks this question to lead the Pharisees to the only logical conclusion: that He is God incarnate. They supposed the Messiah to be a mere man, and therefore reply that the Messiah would be a Son of David. David, as king of Israel, could not and would not address anyone as "Lord" except God. Yet in Ps 109:1, David refers to the Messiah as "Lord." Therefore, the Messiah must be God. The only possible conclusion is that the Messiah is a descendant of David only according to the flesh, yet is also truly divine, sharing His Lordship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees do not answer because they realize the implications and are afraid to confess Jesus to be the Son of God.

This could possibly be a response to being tested in the verses earlier (34-35). Yet, most likely, Jesus is trying to bring them to the realization that He is God and they must confess His divinity and authority.

3. **After seeing that the scribes and Pharisees could not answer Him (verses 42-46), Jesus speaks to the crowds and His disciples. What are some of the main points Jesus speaks of (verses 2-36)?**

Jesus spoke His final public sermon, a grand critique of the ways of the scribes and Pharisees.

There are several themes, but some include:

- (1) The Jewish leaders have God-given authority and teach God's Law, but are personally ungodly and cold-hearted. Their teaching is to be honored, but they are not to be imitated (vv. 2-7).
- (2) God is our true Father and Teacher. A teacher or father on earth is one who leads people to God. The scribes and Pharisees do the opposite, placing themselves in God's position (vv. 8-12).
- (3) In His eightfold indictment of the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 13-36), Jesus charges them with inverting God's values and with being mean-spirited, judgmental, greedy, ambitious, absorbed in externals, and blindly self-righteous. While these charges were directed against the Jewish leaders of the day, every word applies equally to those in the Church who behave in this way.

4. What does Jesus mean when He speaks of "whitewashed tombs" in verse 27? Have you or someone you know ever lived a life like this?

Just as Jesus calls out the hypocrisy of living as a "whitewashed tomb," appearing holy on the outside but unclean on the inside, St. John Chrysostom gives us a profound warning of how to live, how to examine ourselves before the coming of Christ:

The members of the body of Christ have become a tomb of uncleanness? Remember your sonship and how you were born. Consider of what things you have been counted worthy. Recall what sort of garment you received in baptism. You were intended to be a temple without fault, beautiful, not adorned with gold or pearls but with the Spirit that is more precious than these. You are hardly ready to appear in the city above if you remain a sepulcher below.

As Christians we sometimes try to display a holy life when in reality we have nothing holy within us. We may read the Bible, go to Church, pray, fast, volunteer, study well, and help others, but in our hearts we hold feelings of hopelessness, anger, gossip, lust, jealousy, indignation, resentment, hatred, and pride. Just because we look good on the outside to others does not mean that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. This is what we are born to be, but sometimes we become tombs and our faith is dead within us.

5. What are some of Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees and scribes? Can you see any similarities with religious leaders today?

- The Pharisees' misinterpretation of the Law has made the Law a burden to the people.
- Their excessive show of piety is only a sham to put them in a good light.
- They delight in being honored and singled out for praise, putting themselves above the common people.

In verses 8-10 Jesus advised the people not to single out their religious leaders for excessive titles of honor and praise that would make them equal to God the Father and the Messiah. He does not mean to literally call no one father or teacher. That would mean one couldn't refer to the head of one's family as "father." Jesus even referred to Abraham as "father Abraham" (Lk 16:24). But men who have those titles should not be held as equal in authority to God or the Messiah (speaking of Himself).

6. In the concluding verses, Jesus refers to Himself as a "hen who gathers together her chicks beneath her wings" (verse 37). What is He speaking about? How should we understand that in our own lives?

Jesus wanted to gather His people together as a hen protects her chicks under her wings, but they wouldn't let Him. Jesus also wants to protect us if we will just come to Him. Many times we hurt and do not know where to turn. We reject Christ's help because we don't think He can give us what we need. But who knows our needs better than our creator? Those who turned to Jesus will find that He helps and comforts as no one else can.

In our lives today people turn to other things for help, food, drugs, pornography, social media, etc. but forget about Christ and how much He wants to help and protect us from the evil in this world and the attacks of Satan. When a hen sees a fox come close, she gathers her chicks

underneath her wings to protect them and to be willing to sacrifice herself for their protection. Christ did the same thing for us, sacrificing Himself for our salvation, but if a chick runs away and does not come to the mother hen for protection, the chick will be defenseless. Likewise, when evil forces come close to harm us, we must turn to Christ and not run off on our own.

7. Why would we call this Sunday “The Sunday of Advent”?

The last Sunday of Great Lent in the Armenian Church is referred to as the Sunday of Advent. When we think of the word “advent,” which means “coming,” (գալուստ/kaloosd) what comes to mind? Usually it refers to two different events. Palm Sunday, which is next Sunday and Christ’s coming into Jerusalem and Christ’s Second Coming at the Final Judgment.

In both cases it sounds like the future tense. We picture in our minds, especially for the second coming, a future arrival of Jesus Christ in power and glory followed by a future and final judgment, the end of all things. But Christianity and the end of all things are not only future oriented, but are also a person. In the Christian sense, the “end” is not a point in time, or the conclusion of a linear historical timeline. The End is a person, Jesus himself.

We must always remember that Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Almighty who is, was, and is to come (Revelation 1:8, 22:13). He is the revelation of the End of all things, the fulfillment of all things, the reconciliation and healing of all things, the purpose toward and in which all things live, move, and have their being (Acts 17:28). Jesus Christ is the Eschaton – the completion of all things.

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matthew 22:37)