



## Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without realizing it." One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too." And he said, "Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them."

**Introductory Prayer:** Lord, I believe that you are present here as I turn to you in prayer. I trust and have confidence in your desire to give me every grace I need to receive today. Thank you for your love, thank you for your immense generosity toward me. I give you my life and my love in return.

**Petition:** Lord, make my heart more like yours.

**1. Falling into the Same Trap:** Do we ever find ourselves rooting for Jesus in this Gospel passage? "Give it to 'em hard, Lord! They deserve it!" We imagine ourselves there in the scene—our arms sternly crossed, our heads shaking in disapproval of those oh-so hypocritical Pharisees. Soon our thoughts turn to someone we know who "should also receive a good verbal lashing!" Even a priest or a bishop might be the subject of our mental reprimand. Yet we now find ourselves right in the shoes of the very Pharisees we so deplore: Our hearts are embittered and dry. Although we are able to condemn with the Lord, we do not love with the Lord. We forget that Christ would lay down his life for

these Pharisees he is calling to conversion—even if they were the only ones who needed to be saved. Pointing the finger is easy, but a call to conversion can come only from a heart that loves.

**2. The Grumpy Catholics Guild:** Is there anyone who can't find at least one thing wrong in their parish or diocese? One thing is to see, pray for, and help resolve these difficulties. Another matter is to dwell on them. That is what the members of the "Grumpy Catholics Guild" (GCG) do. This Gospel passage is the one exclusive lens through which they view everything. For the Rosary, members of the GCG pray the "Vengeful Mysteries": Jesus curses the fig tree, Jesus clears the temple, Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees. Might I be an anonymous member—or at least a supporter—of the GCG? Christ used hard words, but they were only fruit of an intense love and longing for the scribes' and Pharisees' salvation, not an intense bitterness toward them. If I have any bitterness in my heart, I need to ask Christ for the grace to forgive and to forgive as Christ forgives.

**3. Helping Hand:** Our Lord was the greatest teacher, the great pedagogue of the fullness of life: the love of the Father. He knew how to bring souls along little by little, at their pace and to the extent they were capable. The opposite is true of the lawyers at the end of this Gospel passage. They would load restrictions, unwieldy responsibilities and weighty sacrifices upon the people, but would not reach out a helping hand to assist the people in carrying the weight. As Christians we are called to help illuminate the consciences of those around us so that they might have a closer relationship with God. However, if illuminating their consciences is merely our euphemism for "throwing the book at them", we need to stop and see if Christ's words don't apply to us as well: "For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them."

**Conversation with Christ:** Lord Jesus, at times I look at my heart and see that it is hard and bitter. It is ready to jump self-righteously at the first opportunity to condemn someone else, but only so as to assure myself of my own moral superiority. Grant me a heart, meek and humble like yours.

**Resolution:** If I find myself thinking critically about someone today, I will pray for them and look for two good qualities in them.