

AUGUST 25, 2025, FATHER PETER TURRONE

Today, when we hear people use the word, or we ourselves use the word, woe, it can be a sign of shock. It can be a sign of an exclamation, like “What just happened?” or “Did you see that?” There’s something that was overwhelming. So we usually use it in that way.

Or it’s a way of somebody who might be overwhelmed with emotion, and then it’s very common to say, “Whoa, calm down, just calm down.” So it’s a way of trying to get people to slow down a little bit. But when Jesus uses the word woe, which is part of the Old Testament prophecy as well—like these are admonitions—He means it in a different way.

So how can He say, what can He mean by this? Well, it can be an outburst of grief. It can be an exclamation. And it can be a declaration of doom—so a severe warning. And we know that this gospel passage is part of the longer seven woes, and Jesus is very upset, obviously, with the Pharisees and the scribes.

He calls them hypocrites. So, what is a hypocrite? Well, a hypocrite is not someone who believes but struggles to live out of their own weakness, and they recognize that. That’s not hypocrisy. That means that someone is a sinner in need of the mercy of God and who’s trying to live the gospel as best as they can. Jesus is not condemning that, but what He’s doing is He’s condemning the hypocrites.

So who are hypocrites? Well, a hypocrite is someone who’s an actor. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be very strong, very firm in their faith, but the reality is that on the inside, they just don’t believe. So that is what it means to be a hypocrite, and this is what the Lord condemns. And He has very strong words to say to them. He says, “Look, you’re actors, you are distorting God’s intention.”

So when we read the Word of God, we must understand what God intends through the human author. There's the divine author, the Holy Spirit, and then there's a human author that's inspired by the Lord. So when you read the scriptures, again, what was happening was that not all, but many, were reading the scriptures but they were distorting what God wanted to say.

They were focusing on the small things and making them much greater than they were meant to be. And that's a big problem, because then we can distort and we can mislead people on the path to salvation. So the Lord was very upset, and He says, "You go through, you do all sorts of things, even try to get a convert, and in the end you make them even worse than yourselves."

So what is He saying? That you've presented a version of faith that is not according to the heart of God, but is according to the heart of a corrupt man, corrupt individuals. This is painful because the Lord is the author of our faith. Our faith is based on Him, and then to have it twisted, and when He sees people are being misled, it's very painful.

This is a warning also for the Church today and for some of the leaders, for some of us. When we present our faith to other people, how do we present our faith? You know, I go through social media, not because I want to, but because I have to as a pastor, and also to know what's going on in the world and to see what the challenges are.

And I'm always at a loss for words when I go through the Catholic blog sphere or go through Catholic social media. There are some wonderful people that give good witness. But then we have some professional Catholics, and what they do is anything but Christian. Instead of promoting the faith in Jesus Christ and showing the beautiful things that are taking place in the world, the quiet things that many missionaries are doing throughout the world, there are some people who, because of their

own unwillingness to accept their own sinfulness and their own problems, project them onto other people in the Church.

What they do is they make money off of this on social media, constantly nitpicking over the smallest things or turning small little things that are part of our tradition, and then making that be almost more important than the basics of our faith, which is to love God and to love our neighbor. But that seems to be put aside for the small things that are truly insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

So this is a problem. It still happens today. And this warning is not only for the scribes and for the Pharisees, but it's also a warning for us. So what do I do when I'm presenting my faith to someone? Am I trying to lead someone to Jesus Christ? People are not projects. They are people to be loved and to be brought to the Lord. That's the best that we can do, and the best way we can do that is by examining our own lives and recognizing, is there anything inside of me, Lord, that is hypocritical? Is there something inside of me that is giving a counter-witness to who You are?

And true religion it's okay. We can look without fear and do this examination of conscience. When we do the examination of conscience, there's different ways of doing it. Sometimes we can get bored of doing the same format. What we do is, there are the Ten Commandments, so we can look at them, which is what most people will do when they're going to confession.

So you can examine: in light of the love of God and what I've discovered about the Lord, and in light of His presence and all His goodness and the many blessings He's given me, how have I responded to this? The Ten Commandments are one way, but there's also another way—we can look at the Beatitudes.

So, when I look at the Beatitudes in my life, how am I living the Beatitudes? Do I understand the role of suffering? Do I understand what it means to be a peacemaker? Do I understand that even in the midst of the different challenges I have, the Lord is there—He’s always with me?

Another way we can look is at 1 Corinthians, where St. Paul says love is patient, love is kind. This is a great examination of conscience. But I would also propose that the seven woes be a form, a format with which we can do the examination of conscience. So we can look within ourselves again—what am I doing in my life that needs to be changed for the glory of God?

The Lord gives us some examples. We’re going to hear more of them as we go on continuing to read this. But even the idea of putting on, of focusing—and Jesus Himself says in other scripture that we shouldn’t swear on anything. He says, “Your yes should be yes, and your no should be no.” So if I believe in God, I’m willing to lay my life for the Lord, and then I have no need to say anything else. He says, “Anything else is from the devil.”

We can look at a wonderful example in the first reading. In the first reading, we hear from Paul, and Paul is this great apostle, this great man who knows what it’s like to be in love with the Lord. He himself, even though he never met Jesus prior to the resurrection, met Him in the resurrection.

So when he met the apostles and he had spoken with them for those few days, and then as he was saying Mass and going around, and they had access to the scriptures, he would have learned, he would have heard, he would have read what Jesus had preached when He was on earth, and he would have seen this and he himself would have come to recognize again how this applies to himself.

He would have examined his own conscience. He would have realized how, in the past, prior to his conversion to Christ, he would have seen some of these things. But he also came to realize the mercy of God. He changed his life and became a remarkable evangelist.

So we look at Paul as a man who had been converted from one extreme to becoming a faithful disciple and the greatest missionary. And then you have the bad example of the scribes and the Pharisees who have distorted religion because they have failed to understand that the law, the Word of God, must be understood in light of the Holy Spirit.

Paul understood that, and that's why he became such a great missionary. So we ask, through his intercession, that we too can understand this and that the Holy Spirit will illuminate us to live the law of God—which is to love Him and to love our neighbor—in our hearts, and to be more effective at evangelizing this as well.