

Many of us have grown up with heroes or role models in our lives. Heroes may be teachers, coaches, grandparents or even older siblings. They could be scores of people, some of whom we have never even met. We may count a professional athlete, musician, maybe even a saint- who knows? But in all cases, they are people to whom we look for inspiration. We want to be like them because they inspire the very best in us.

Centuries ago, the Scribes would have been heroes to faithful Jews. Since the time of Ezra, they represented a body of teachers whose office was to interpret the Law to the people.¹ Their office began after the prophets; the derivation of the word means “to count” and in the past they also held a civic role, including drafting legal documents for marriages, loans, inheritances or the sale of land.

As official interpreters of the Law as contained in the first five books of the Scriptures, in effect they were the ancient version of lawyers and judges. They had to interpret the law and apply it. But in today’s Gospel, they are neither respected as prominent leaders in society, nor are they heroes at all. No, it is the poor widow who takes center stage. The real hero is the quiet one who shies away from the limelight, but who actually lives the fullness of the faith and its demands.

The beginning of the gospel spoke of how the scribes devoured the savings of widows, how they took advantage of the people in the congregation, preyed on their gullibility for their own wealth and profit. This is why the Lord says that they will receive a stiff sentence at the final judgment, the highest court of them all.

It is critically important to have people to whom we look for inspiration, real people worthy of emulation. To whom do we look today? I would like

¹ The original meaning of the Hebrew word "soferim" was "people who know how to write"; and therefore the royal officials who were occupied in recording in the archives the proceedings of each day were called scribes. (See Jewish Encyclopedia entry “Scribes”)

to suggest St. John Fisher, who held to the Catholic faith, as a lone voice among the bishops of England. He refused to remain silent in the face of schism. Consider St. Peter Damian, who in the 11th century begged the Pope to remove from the priesthood those who had disgraced it by their mortally sinful vices. This was not reading for the faint of heart.

Jesus warns that those who act for their own interests, those who seek recognition for themselves, will undergo a “very severe condemnation.” The comparative form of the adjective is used here, implying that they will be more harshly judged because of their position of trust. After all, more is expected to those to whom more has been given.

This is why we must pray for our Church leaders. Despite people’s anger, which I believe is righteous anger, our prayer and our persistence is needed much more. Every time you are discussing your concerns, also add a prayer. Recall, the widow did not go unnoticed. Your concerns are not unnoticed; Now we wait to see how they are enacted in real change.

I am praying for courage for our leaders: courage to speak up, to teach the fullness of truth, to work to restore trust through transparency and concrete action. But above all, may they focus on the primary task of any religious leader, namely the salvation of souls, the highest good of all.

The People of God are not at all interested in the internal Church politics. You demand accountability and will not stop demanding it, even as we do so in truth and charity. The exercise of charity is always connected to the truth. If you love someone, you tell them the truth.

Many of our shepherds are good and hard-working priests who seek to do the right thing. May they teach us the truth and in their leadership, move us in the direction of healing and reform. Now is the time for self-sacrificial love and courageous witness.