

Reflection by The Very Rev. Phoebe A. Roaf

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 Matthew 5:1-12



The Very Rev. Phoebe A. Roaf is the 22nd rector of St. Philip's in Richmond. A fourth generation Episcopalian, she has deep roots in Virginia, but grew up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Mother Phoebe was the first African-American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Louisiana. Her first position after graduating from VTS was Associate Rector of Trinity New Orleans, the largest Episcopal church in the Diocese of Louisiana, where she served for three years. She was the first person of color to serve as a priest at Trinity.

When Mother Phoebe joined St. Philip's in 2011, she became the first woman to serve as Rector of the church in its 150 year history. Mother Phoebe loves accompanying people on their spiritual journeys and helping them identify how God is working in their lives.

This lesson from the Gospel of Matthew is instructive regarding the potential for hypocrisy in the church. Jesus commends the religious authorities for their teaching but he isn't pleased with their actions.

He provides a litany of things that leaders should refrain from doing, perhaps because some priests were ostentatious in their public prayers and yet failed to follow their own instruction. Some of the religious authorities focused on shifting heavy burdens onto others. They insisted on having the best clothes, the best seats at functions, the best food, the best of everything. In other words, the leaders were caught up in the trappings of religion but they had lost sight of the fundamentals.

As we reflect on the state of the church today, have things changed or do we continue to struggle with these issues? We must be mindful that our omniscient God is the one who knows all of our desires as well as the secrets of our hearts.

Those who aspire to serve the church are invited to use our Lord Jesus Christ as the primary example for how we conduct our affairs. Jesus' life was devoted to serving others in a spirit of gratefulness and humility. There was always consistency in what he said and what he did, and the same can be true for us. As leaders we can regularly ask ourselves, am I willing to do the things I ask of others?

During your church's stewardship campaign, the clergy and vestry have an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership by completing their pledge cards in a timely fashion and sharing the total value of those pledges for the upcoming year with the congregation.

Before asking others to give sacrificially, we must demonstrate our willingness to do the same. We reveal our love for God when our words and our actions are consistent.



Reflection Question

As a disciple of Christ, do you willingly do yourself what you expect of others?

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