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A number of us here will remember the great excitement in the Church surrounding the Second Vatican Council and how things were going to change. There was one particular Bishop in Ireland who came back from Rome full of enthusiasm and in one of the local parishes the following Sunday he was telling the people that we are all of equal standing in the church now, clergy and laity together, me right down to you. This was followed by a ripple of laughter in the congregation.

But it doesn't just apply to Catholic clergy. TV evangelists makes me feel a bit uneasy at times. Some seem to turn religious broadcasting into a kind of personality cult. Worship of the preacher takes over from worship of God and many people seem to fall for it. This could also happen to us priests if we're not careful.

Isn't this what Jesus is referring to in today's gospel regarding the dubious religious leaders of his day. They liked the limelight and being put on pedestals. They loved people kowtowing to them. They didn't practice what they preached. They burdened their people with all sorts of man-made rules and regulations. They used religion to keep people in servitude whilst at the same time upstaging themselves. But Jesus rocked their little boat and that's what put him in their bad books.

I think we as an institutional church are not entirely above criticism in this regard. We, as clergy have often overestimated ourselves to the detriment of our mission. It's called clericalism. Vat 11 in the 1960's tried to correct this but 'old habits die hard'. I think we need to 'beat our breasts' a bit more often. This kind of clericalism led to abuse in other areas. I notice there's been quite a bit in the papers recently about the apparitions in Maedjugorge, on whether they are true or fake. To me what may tilt the balance in their favour was when one of the seers asked Our Lady what the greatest need in today's church is.

She is reported to have said: Your greatest need is for humility and simplicity.

Isn't that precisely what Our Lord is asking of us in today's Gospel and this particularly applies to overseers.

Our Lord, himself is, as always, our perfect example. He said 'all authority is heaven and Earth has been given to me' and yet he lived a simple life with no airs and graces. He spoke with authority not to keep people down but set them free from the burdens of mind and body and soul which weighed them down. Taking on a servant's role, he washed the apostles' feet and finally he endured the ultimate humiliation of the Cross. Unlike the religious leaders of his day His ministry was devoid even of a hint of self glory.

The Church has always been slow on the uptake to embrace this kind of authority but perhaps, with the shortage of vocations and a greater reliance on lay people, we are on the road to a brighter future where authority will be exercised as the Lord intended - thus creating a humbler church for the benefit of all.