

Bishop Boland met with the priests of the diocese at Conception Abbey this week, and he told us a story I can't resist repeating for you. Once there was a pastor who could not get along with his bishop. He had difficult parishes to serve, and hopeless associates to help him. When he got a letter from the bishop complaining about his preaching he had enough. So he drove to the bishop's residence, stormed up the walk, and pounded on the door. The housekeeper timidly opened it and the pastor shouted, "I want to see the bishop!" The housekeeper, tears in her eyes, sobbed, "You can't see the bishop; he died last night." The pastor was stunned. He went back to the car, drove around a while, and then decided to return to the bishop's house. He knocked on the door, the housekeeper answered, and he announced, "I want to see the bishop." She said, "Father, I told you you can't see the bishop; he died last night." Again the pastor returned to his car, drove around another couple hours and then went back to the bishop's house. He knocked on the door, the housekeeper answered, and he said, "I want to see the bishop." She said, "Father, I told you, you can't see the bishop. He died last night. Don't you understand?" The priest said, "I do understand; I just love to hear you say it."

Poor leadership in the church has been with us since the day Jesus told the crowds, "Do what the scribes and Pharisees teach you, but don't do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach." This passage comes near the end of Matthew's Gospel, just before the passion. Jesus rejects the religious leaders, and they will send him to the cross.

I have to tell you as a religious leader, it's hard to talk about this passage, especially since so many of our Catholic leaders have abused their positions of authority. Some of us have committed scandalous crimes against children and women; usually we sin more subtly: we put people down in the confessional or in the vestibule. I know that I sin when I do not observe what I preach. When I hear Jesus warn the crowds, "Do what your religious leaders teach, but don't do as they do," I can only apologize that your leaders do not always practice what we teach.

Sadly, religious leaders are not the only ones who let us down. Sooner or later, we become disillusioned by others we trusted: politicians who commit crimes, teachers who misjudge us, lovers who prove unfaithful, and parents who simply become human.

How right Jesus is: there's only one real rabbi, one real parent, and one real instructor. That's God. We fail our duties, because we're human. Do what your leaders do only when we live what we teach, correct our faults, and forgive, because the one you follow then will not be us. It will be God.