

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 11th 2016

Throughout the early autumn season here in the northern hemisphere, the Church's Ordinary Time is winding down and the imperative of authentically and fully following Christ, even to difficulty or death is a constant theme. Today's liturgy challenges us to take being "in Christ" very seriously. We are not to pretend to be disciples by some external show, but to be transformed from within.

Both Paul in the letter to the Galatians, and Jesus, witnessed by Luke, challenge us to deal with the inner commitment that the rest of our choices flow out of. If we do not know what our inner commitment is, or we have never seriously made an inner commitment, all the external show in the world is meaningless.

We all know people who identify themselves with a structure of beliefs, and follow certain public identifying "rules" or practices, but who have not ever asked themselves what interior participation in that pattern of beliefs really means. A Jew who won't eat a cheeseburger or a Catholic who abstains from meat on Fridays of Lent, or a Muslim who doesn't touch food or drink during the day in the month of Ramadan all appear to be faithful to their traditions, but if each does not respond with compassion to hungry neighbors, those persecuted or extorted by corrupt governments, or cruelty imposed on the vulnerable, do not, in fact, adhere to the call of real faith that each of these traditions profess.

The God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus is emphatic about action to remedy the various kinds of cruelty of humanity as a necessary condition for relationship to the Divine self. Within the Christian Tradition we are warned over and over that the only "certitude" of our faith is the certitude that God is Love – and requires those who would claim the name of Christ-follower to be a person of mercy and compassion. All other matters of faith flow from this profound conviction. All external behaviors that do not flow from an inner relationship grounded in love of God, oneself and all others are sham.

Paul emphasizes that for us as Christians the certitude of the Law is no longer salvific. We are made for the freedom of the love of Christ and observance of any law will not save us – even observance of the ten commandments. Rather our salvation is in our interior and personal relationship with Jesus, who calls us to mercy toward all his friends and enemies – as he himself demonstrated. We don't do that alone; Jesus provides his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to in-form (shape) and en-courage (provide courage within) each disciple.

So, Paul and Jesus both warn us that external actions that appear to be law abiding, but are in fact nothing more than hypocrisy, not only are not enough, they get in the way of becoming open to God's Spirit that transforms us from within.

I am often struck by how religious practices or value language slogans are easy to adopt in public, but very hard to implement in our lives. Perhaps a way to "winterize" the home of our hearts would be to open the doors and windows within and examine the real attitudes we live by. For me, such an interior examination begins with an assessment of where my time, my energy and my money is going. What is the focus of my time use today? To whom or for what do I hand over my material resources? Where was the primary energy of my thinking, feeling and acting going today? My calendar, my check-book and my "to-do" list all serve to help assess whether I am really a friend and companion of Jesus or

have given in to empty show and banner slogans as a substitute.

“Let your mercy come to me, O Lord.” (Psalm 119.41 – the Response to today’s first reading.)

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