

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jun 19th 2024

Hidden Acts of Righteousness

The core message in today's Word of God is to avoid showing off or being prideful. Whether it's giving, praying, or fasting, your actions should be private between you and God. It's tempting to seek recognition for our spiritual practices. While there are times we discuss our spiritual journey without seeking attention, using religion for personal gain devalues our spiritual deeds.

Public acts of faith or prayer are not wrong; in fact, they are good. Donating publicly and communal prayer are valuable. However, seeking attention through these actions is unchristian.

We read this gospel passage every year on Ash Wednesday - at the beginning of the Lent.

Back in the days of Jesus, Jewish villages had people in charge of collecting and giving out help to those in need: the poor, orphans, widows, and travellers. It was a beautiful tradition of kindness, though sometimes, the wealthy saw it as a chance to show off.

During the Sabbath celebration, generous donors were publicly praised, applauded, and seated with the rabbis as exemplary individuals. Jesus called such individuals who seek attention "hypocrites", as they wasted opportunities for good deeds without being noticed.

This tendency towards seeking attention remains evident even in contemporary times. It is common to observe charitable actions being portrayed as photo opportunities on social media.

Jesus recommends his disciples to do charity in secret: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (vv. 3-4). The Church Fathers had understood this truth well. St. Ambrose had said to the rich: "Remember that you do not give what is yours to the poor; you only give back what is due to them."

Bible Claret