

Faith or Works?

Unfortunately, these two facets of our faith are often pitted against each other. In many of his letters, St. Paul insists on the superiority of faith, while today's reading from St. James underscores the importance of good works. It is understandable that one might get confused. Actually, both are vital. In fact, one without the other does not result in full Christian living. At issue is how they fit together.

Paul's insistence on faith was probably a corrective for the erroneous belief that we can earn eternal happiness by our good works. This was not simply a problem with the Jewish law and practices but with the religious law and practices of many societies. Even today we find people convinced that obeying religious laws assures salvation. To this, Paul insisted that it was faith in Jesus that saved, not conformity to law. Paul never said that believers should not obey the law.

Rather, he would insist that such obedience should flow from faith, not vice versa.

It seems that the people to whom today's second reading was directed took the idea of "faith alone" to an extreme. They were not committed to good works. This letter corrected that error. It states that faith without works is dead. In fact, good works demonstrate the authenticity and depth of one's faith.

The message for today should be clear. Faith and works belong together. Genuine faith manifests itself in works of love and mercy, and the works of love and mercy that flow from faith are of God.

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

FOR Reflection

- ★ Which works of mercy does your faith inspire?
- ★ How are these works fortified by faith?

Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

JAMES 2:18



Dear Padre,

I'm having trouble finding a good place to pray. I can't get to church every day. I have a noisy household, and I can't pray at work. Any ideas?

The best place to pray is in solitude. But solitude in this case doesn't mean an isolated place; it is, rather, a state of the heart. Many Christians can enter into a state of solitude on a crowded train. I've talked with others



who find solitude while sitting on a bench in a crowded shopping mall.

However, to cultivate this interior state that opens a Christian to heartfelt conversation with God, many of us need to physically shut out distractions. As Jesus advised, go into your room—your secret place—close the door, and pray there. For some people, this “secret place” is a church or chapel. Many people pray before

or after Mass. Some churches have a special oratory or chapel for the Blessed Sacrament.

But like you, many people find it difficult to go to a church or chapel every day, so some of them devote a special corner of their home to prayer. This prayer corner usually has a Bible, a crucifix, a statue, a sacred picture, a candle, or a plant.

We can find solitude in the car, in a favorite nature spot, in the garden, or on a morning jog. Once you start looking for it, solitude isn't as difficult to find as you'd expect because God is present in every place and in every moment—so wherever we can find solitude, he will be there.

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A WORD FROM *Pope Francis*

You may know all the commandments, all the prophecies, all the truths of the faith, but if this isn't put into practice, is not translated into works, it serves nothing....A faith without works, a faith that doesn't get you involved, isn't faith. It's words and nothing more than words.

HOMILY, FEBRUARY 21, 2014

Calendar

Monday

SEPTEMBER 13
*St. John Chrysostom,
Bishop and Doctor
of the Church*
1 Tm 2:1–8
Lk 7:1–10

Tuesday

SEPTEMBER 14
*The Exaltation of the
Holy Cross*
Nm 21:4b–9
Phil 2:6–11
Jn 3:13–17

Wednesday

SEPTEMBER 15
Our Lady of Sorrows
1 Tm 3:14–16
Jn 19:25–27 or
Lk 2:33–35

Thursday

SEPTEMBER 16
*Sts. Cornelius, Pope,
and Cyprian, Bishop,
Martyrs*
1 Tm 4:12–16
Lk 7:36–50

Friday

SEPTEMBER 17
Weekday
1 Tm 6:2c–12
Lk 8:1–3

Saturday

SEPTEMBER 18
Weekday
1 Tm 6:13–16
Lk 8:4–15

Sunday

SEPTEMBER 19
*Twenty-fifth Sunday in
Ordinary Time*
Wis 2:12, 17–20
Jas 3:16–4:3
Mk 9:30–37

