



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

August 29, 2021

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

There is a story about Mark Twain, that says he was always suspicious of overly pious Christians. One day at a dinner party a man confronted Twain and said, "Before I die, I am going to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When I arrive, I will climb Mount Sinai, and from the very top I will boldly proclaim the Ten Commandments." Twain replied, "I have a better idea. Why don't you stay right here at home and obey them?" Twain's sarcastic remark echoes a theme in today's readings, a theme that plays out the difference between talking and doing. The letter to James says, "Be doers of the word, not only hearers." And Jesus uses the prophet Isaiah in today's gospel to register his complaint: "This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Jesus' words certainly apply to us, because we gather every week to honor God in our call and response at Mass with our lips. We place our sins at the altar of sacrifice. Our respond to the Gospel message is, "Thanks be to God." We sing, "Holy, holy, holy," and we say, "Amen" (*I believe*) as we receive the body and blood of Christ. But what we say with our lips is intended to change our hearts. Our words are meant to lead to actions that will build up God's kingdom.

We have a modern example right before us in this pandemic. Some Christians say that they love their family and friends but refuse to take a vaccine that science and realization has proven to be effective. Yet we refuse to put that love in action beyond our own selfish ideas and excuses? We speak the words, that we love our children, family, and friends, but how have we taken time to think how a single act of unselfishness can demonstrate care and save lives?

We say that we love our country, but are we willing to become involved in the political process, to assure that the candidates that are elected are men and women of character and integrity, by exercising our right to vote? Do we speak up and talk about what needs to change, but never take a stand, attend a rally, or encourage our brothers and sisters to vote. Are we just hearers of the word or doers? Do we just give God lip service or we willing to put our faith into action?

Words are important in our communications. But if words do not lead to actions, they become empty and worthless. However, we know that the transition from words to action is often a difficult one. But here is the good news: our actions are not dependent only on our own courage and willpower. As Christians we believe that God works with us and through us as we act on his word to make a difference in our world. The Second reading today from the letter to James says, "*Humbly welcome the word that has been planted within you and is able to save your souls.*" God's word has been planted within us and encourages us to action. It is our calling to hear the Word of God, and to let it manifest within us. The word which grows within us and the body and blood of Christ which we share have the power to change and empower us to become people who are wiser, more courageous, and more committed to doing God's will.

As we gather at Gods calling, let us open our hearts to receive the word that God has planted within us. Not to be selfish and only speak empty words but let us pray that God changes us as we approach the table of the Lord. In this way we may be able by God's grace to worship God not only with our lips but with our hearts and be missionary disciples not only in words but in actions—actions that make a difference in our lives and in our sisters and brothers of the world. Go out then! And live the word of God in all that we say and do.