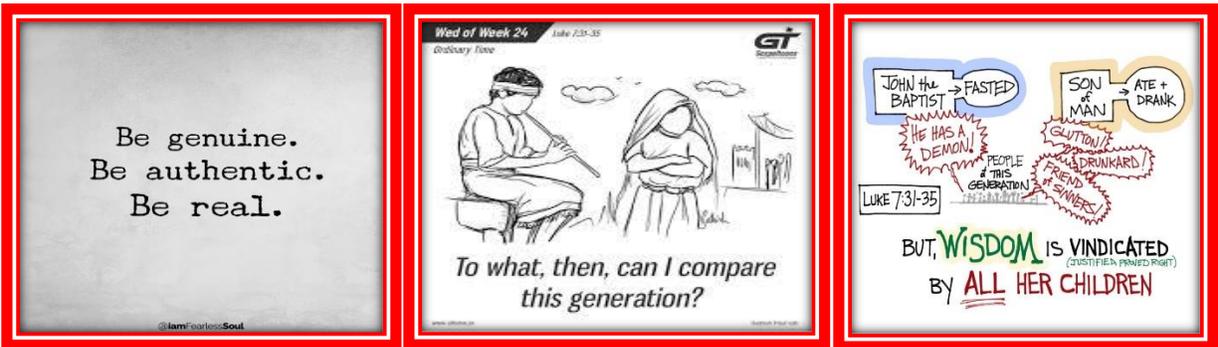


September 16, 2020 – Wednesday of the 24th Weekday in Ordinary Time



**“Giving heed to the call of the Lord and doing away with all hypocritical aspects of our life; instead, having expressions of faith, that are real and genuine!
(1 Cor 12:31-13:13 and Lk 7:31-35)**

After his victory over Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium, Augustus Caesar came back to Rome in triumph. Among the huge crowd who greeted him, was a man (a bird seller) who had a bird that was taught to say, “Hail, Caesar, victorious.” Augustus Caesar, the victorious king was greatly impressed that the bird was able to utter praises in honor of his victory and bought the bird for a large sum. Then someone got Caesar aside and whispered to him, that the man had another bird that was just as talented. The man was summoned, and Caesar asked for a demonstration of what the other bird could do. The man selling the birds objected and expressed reluctance, but Caesar insisted. Finally, the bird uttered: “Hail, Antony, victorious.” The second bird ended up uttering praises to the enemy who had been defeated by Augustus Caesar. The birds had been only trained to speak by rote. Their expression was not something “that was really meant”. Their expression was laden with tones of duplicity and lack of genuineness.

The Gospel of the Day is a presentation on how people are also very often similar failing to have expressions that are real and genuine and falling into the trap of duplicity and double-standardness.

The Gospel is an exposition on the attitudes of duplicity and being a double standard that can cram our Christian lives. Jesus gives an illustration of how the attitudes of duplicity and being double-standard can cram our Christian lives. He speaks of “children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We piped to you and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep’” (Lk 7: 32). Two persons who had committed themselves totally to the cause of the Kingdom are under the scanner today – John the Baptist and Jesus.

John the Baptist lived in the wilderness and in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. John did not drink wine, and he and his followers fasted regularly. He baptized people in the Jordan River. But John also preached repentance and gave a clarion call to turn away from one sins. And this irked the people. The elders of the Jewish community dreaded him because he recognized the corruption of the priests and publicly called

them to repent and be baptized. They refused because they wanted to keep their power, their wealth, their full stomachs, and their fine clothing.

Jesus went around the cities and towns healing the sick and curing the lepers and doing many mighty works. Jesus shared in the table-fellowship of many people regularly. He preached the Kingdom of God. But Jesus also challenged people to let go off their sinful and corrupt lives and turn to God in penitence. And this annoyed the leaders. The Pharisees hated him because he preached with much authority and his new understanding of the law was highly challenging. They rejected Him because they wanted to stick to their traditions, empty hearts, and their inhuman practices. Jesus and John both would have hit high on the popularity charts if they had "played nice" or "would have allowed things to be a little easier". But both of Them did not budge. This is what Jesus says, "We played the flute for you, you did not dance; We mourned to you, you did not weep." (Lk 7:32)

Both of them refused to compromise on their convictions and principles of life. It was a tragedy of that generation that two of the great leaders, John and Jesus, though came with apparent contrast found themselves rejected and that these two great messengers of the Kingdom, met with a tragic end – one beheaded, the other crucified.

This shows an important philosophy that underlies many lives: an attitude of indifference to the truth and an attitude of rejection of those who challenge our lives. This tragedy affects our generation too. We often wrap ourselves often in the garment of hard-heartedness and arrogance and fail to allow the message of the Truth to bring a transformation in our lives. We neatly hide ourselves in the dark shadows of indifference and apathy and remain unconcerned with the workings of God's Power and Grace in our hearts.

But the Lord today renders a wake-up call to shake off the dusts of apathy, hypocrisy, and indifference from our lives. Very often our faith is only training to speak prayers and express articles of faith merely "by rote". Very often, our faith expressions are not something "that is really meant from the heart" Very often, our religious expressions are laden with tones of duplicity and lack of genuineness.

Let us give heed to the call of the Lord and do away with all hypocritical aspects of our life, and instead have expressions that are real and genuine and thus become an authentic follower of God and an ardent missionary of the Kingdom.

Let us be encouraged by the lives of St Cornelius, Pope and St Cyprian, Bishop – both Martyrs – whose feast we celebrate today and who encouraged each other to lead virtuous, self-sacrificing, and loving lives for God.

Let us pray:

Lord, I can be contrary of heart, blind, and deaf to your truth. I go through periods of negativity and complaint when nothing seems to please me. Come to me in my poverty

of spirit. Reveal love's wisdom to me and let me be counted among Your children. May I listen, hear, understand, and respond to Your sacred voice. May it be the refreshment and nourishment of my soul.

Jesus, I trust in You