

## Homily by Fr. Nick Tran

Pure religion is *pure-hearted*

The readings today talk about two different kinds of service to God. First, There are believers who offer God “lip-service.” These are the ones Jesus criticizes harshly, saying that: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.* Second, there are believers who offer what we might call “heart service.” People who are *doers of the word and not hearers only.* As James emphasizes in today reading: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction.*

### May I tell you a story about Robert Adams

Robert Adams was on the receiving end of this pure form of religion. When he was 11 years old, he and his family had no home and spent six nights a week sleeping in the bed of his parents’ pick-up truck. One night a week, they were able to afford a motel. He was hungry all the time, and his biggest meal was lunch, when kind cafeteria ladies gave him more food. Just before Christmas, a family from their parish went out of town, leaving Robert’s family not only the keys to their home, but a Christmas tree, Christmas presents, and a refrigerator so stocked with food that made Robert cry when he opened it.

The family from their parish did not just profess their faith to God with “lip-service.” Rather, they gave what they had to others. Robert suggests that there was not any judgment, and the family did not provide rules for their home; they just let his family enjoy freedom and dignity for the holidays. It changed his life, and he decided to do something for others one day.

The Pharisees and scribes in today’s Scripture demonstrate this “lip-service” to God. They, and anyone like them, immerse themselves in religious customs, but because their hearts are far from God, they are filled with malice. They direct their worship to God, but to fellow believers, direct their arrogance and judgment. No good deeds result from this – no building up of the kingdom of God happens with this. No life-changing-for-the-good experiences happen in this environment. No opportunities to witness to the goodness of God arise from this.

Yet for those who are doers of the word, and who care for others in their affliction, there is room for bountiful harvest. Today, Robert Adams runs a national nonprofit organization whose mission it is to serve full meals on Thanksgiving to families in need. He began with the goal of providing 10 families a full meal, but this effort has grown to include 800 volunteers and more than 2,500 boxes of food, 53 pounds each, for hungry individuals and families in Utah and cities in Texas, Ohio, and Florida.

If our hearts are full of love, if we have compassion for the needy, and if we are humble, then our words and actions will be full of love, compassion, and humility. It can change people’s lives out there. If we serve people with our heart-service, we can bring more souls to God because people will recognize that we are Jesus’ true disciples.

For instance, we can care for the homeless in our hometown Chattanooga. I met a homeless woman at the gas station last week while she was looking for food at the garbage cans there. I asked her what she was looking for something to eat because she was hungry. I bought her some food and drinks for the day. I saw her wearing

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a rosary on her neck. Then I asked her “are you Catholic?” She said Yes. She was baptized in Catholic Church, but she was homeless and did not go to church, but she still prays the rosary. She was so happy to have food and drinks for the day and thank God for giving her food and drinks when she was devastating. Jesus wants us to see him in the poor, the needy, and the homeless around us and give them heart-service.

Dear brothers and sisters, to have heart service to others, we should let Jesus to come into our hearts through the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. He wants to enter our proud hearts and teach us His humility. He wants to enter our bitter hearts and show us the way to forgiveness. He wants to live in us so that we can live for others. No matter what condition our hearts are in, Jesus wants to heal us. He is full of mercy and compassion for sinners, which means that He is full of mercy and compassion for us. If Jesus lives in our hearts, we shall have heart service for others for sure.

What is within our hearts? Do we offer lip service – or heart service – to God? Any act of kindness and compassion from our hearts can change another’s life and build the Kingdom of God in ways that we could never envision.