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September 27, 2020

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time- A

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We've all heard these phrases: "Talk is cheap, it's actions that count." Or "You have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk." And "It's not what you say, it's what you do- Actions speak louder than words."

We can't dismiss these sayings, as they apply to how we relate to others and to our God.

Every one of us has been hurt at some point by promises given to us and then broken by those we trusted. We felt betrayed and used. We are left with scars and wounds when we are lied to or deceived.

So why did Jesus tell this story?

The religious leaders, the chief priests and elders—questioned Jesus' authority. They thought, 'Who does this Jesus think he is coming into Jerusalem and receiving the praises of the masses and then driving the moneychangers out of the temple?'

Jesus was getting the attention they felt *they* were entitled to. This had to stop.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people thought *they* knew everything they had to know about the coming Messiah and just what sort of saviour he would be, or should be. They had memorized all of the rules and regulations, they knew them in detail, but they didn't apply them to *themselves*. Oh, they applied them to *everyone else*, laying heavy burdens on people, but they *excused* themselves. Jesus told this story to expose their

hypocrisy. Religious “know-it-alls” are always the hardest people to deal with, believe me!

The main theme of today’s reading is about *honest sincerity*.

Honesty is at the core of our truly religious expressions, particularly being honest with what we tell ourselves. When we lie to ourselves we always get into trouble.

In the Gospel account, the younger brother tells his father: “Yes, I’ll go and work” and then didn’t while the older brother said: “No, not me” and later regretted his words and went to work because he had *integrity*. His *actions* spoke louder than his *words*. He *was honest* while his younger brother was not. The younger brother spoke the *words* the father wanted to hear but he had no integrity. He was insincere because he had no intention of *working* even though he said he would.

The son who ultimately did the will of his father was the first son because he eventually obeyed. Jesus then likens the first son to tax collectors and prostitutes—the outcasts of Jewish society—*because they believed* John the Baptist and accepted “the way of righteousness” *in spite of their initial disobedience* to the Law.

How many of us sometimes pray that way? We give God the words of our prayers, words we think He wants to hear from us and end up feeling like we are pious and religious but never seem to get around to following through on them. God is not fooled but we fool ourselves with our empty promises.

So, to go back now: What is vital to our personal religion?

The first thing is honesty. We must be honest with God and likewise honest with ourselves. Without honesty we are doomed to fail. People *will* discover we are frauds. Our love relationships *will* collapse and our friendships *will* be lost.

Christianity is a way of living in the truth. Christianity is a matter of living in our professional lives, in our personal relationships with others, and living with God in the truth, *all* the while being honest with ourselves, *all* the while being sincere in what we say to others and in *how* we treat them.

Dear friends, Talk is cheap; intentions are too often little more than wishful thinking; appearances are deceptive. Being honest and then *acting* in

honesty are sometimes tough things to do. Sincere honesty is one of the *hardest* and most demanding things about being a Christian. Honesty is the narrow road to our eternal salvation, the way of living that Jesus puts in front of you and me.

Continue to stay safe and healthy.

Fr. Ignatius Tran