



ST. BARTHOLOMEW the APOSTLE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

22nd Sunday 2021

Seeking attention, a religious snob, who liked to appear full of virtue, once said to Mark Twain, *"Before I die, to honor my religious traditions, I'm going to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I shall climb to the top of Mount Sinai and read the Ten Commandments aloud!"* To which Twain replied, ***"I have a better idea! Why don't you stay right at home and keep them?"***

"Words, words, words." So the world-weary Hamlet once dismissed the book he was reading. He had come to know too much about deceit from his troubled family to trust the accumulation of words. Well-spoken words may sound grand, but we learn that the integrity of the person behind the talk is more important than mere syllables strung together.



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So begins the challenge for every preacher: to practice what we preach. And this becomes the acid test for world leaders as well: If we read their lips, will we know their hearts?

And what about the men and women in the pews, who struggle in day-to-day relationships with family and community to say what they mean and mean what they say—to match words with deeds?

Are any of us as good as our word, or do we simply multiply words, as Hamlet suspected?

Now add to this thought the counsel of James, taken from our second reading for today: *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* James is a big believer that Christians should be people of action, putting their faith in practice. If we who claim to follow Christ are the salt of the earth, James thinks we should be out of the salt shaker and scattered in the world where we can do some good. James has little patience for pious talk, orthodox creeds, and polite worship *if* those words and beliefs do not propel a person into the world of



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need as the caring, redemptive, reconciling presence of Christ. In virtually every chapter of his epistle, James will return to this theme. As he will say elsewhere, *Faith without works is dead*. We also hear that Jesus and the Pharisees are engaged in a debate over some of the religious traditions of the time. Now, there is nothing wrong with being a traditionalist. Jesus was a traditionalist in His religious practices. He read the Scriptures. He worshipped and even preached in the synagogue. And yet, His fidelity to tradition was constantly being challenged by the Pharisees. And in today's Gospel, they are at it again. As you know, the Hebrew Tradition contained a great many dietary laws and customs, among which was the custom of scrupulously washing one's hands before eating. "*Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders, but eat their food with unclean hands?*" the Pharisees demanded of Jesus. And His reply was, "*It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of the Scripture: The worship they*



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offer is worthless. The doctrines they teach are only human regulations".

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were using tradition to serve their own ends (in this instance, to gather evidence that Jesus was a law-breaker).

Jesus had often taught that there are times when laws and traditions can become obstacles to justice and equity and decency in human relationships. Consequently, they are subject to development ... enrichment ... and sometimes even abandonment. **Jesus castigates the Pharisees: Religion, he says, is not a game of rules - the creation of a cruel God. Religion is an expression of love - the creation of a compassionate God.**

What is really at issue here is the Pharisees' *insincerity*. They were out to get Jesus, by any means. They were degrading the Law, actually, by using it as a tool, a tactic. Jesus knew this and



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He spoke out against their hypocrisy. *"This people honors me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me".*

We recall the "Parable of the Last Judgment" in which Jesus spells out in the clearest terms our Number One priority in life as a Christian People. In the parable, the King says to those on his right, *"Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you...*

For I was hungry and you gave me food...thirsty and you gave me drink ...a stranger and you made me welcome...naked and you clothed me...sick and you visited me...in prison and you came to me" (Mt25).

Notice, Jesus did **not** say,

- *I was hungry and **you felt sorry for Me...***
- *I was naked and **you wished with all your heart that I had a full wardrobe...***



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- *I was sick and **you were concerned about my condition...***
- *I was imprisoned and **you could almost feel the handcuffs cutting into my wrists.***

It didn't add up that way for Jesus. What mattered was that the hungry were fed, the naked were clothed, the sick and the imprisoned were ministered to. Jesus was saying, in effect,

"Don't bother telling me how you feel about them. Tell me what you are doing for them. Love is something you do. Show Me that you practice what you preach!"

Throughout the Gospels, the language Jesus uses to condemn the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees is always harsh and uncompromising. He says:

- They preach but they do not practice.
- They bind up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders.
- They do all their deeds to be seen by men.



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- They love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues.
- They pay tithes while neglecting the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith.
- They are frauds, blind fools, blind guides; they are like white-washed tombs, beautiful to look at on the outside but on the inside full of filth and dead men's bones.
- They display a holy exterior, but inside they are filled with evil.

Fools! Frauds! Blind guides! White-washed tombs! Notice again that these very strong words of Jesus are ***not*** directed toward atheists or agnostics or criminal-types or public sinners. **They are directed at respected Churchmen -- men who publicly profess faith in God, who publicly adhere to religious law, who publicly participate in sacred ceremonies.** (My friends, thus far, we might be thinking, based on what we've been



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hearing in the news, that that sounds like some of our bishops and priests); but in reality, it can sound like most of us, does it not?

We believe in God; we try to obey the Commandments; we keep holy the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus could indict us as sinners, Why?

- Because we could use religion as a showcase for our own virtue.
- We could practice a religion of the "letter" but *not* of the "spirit," of the "head" *but* not of the "heart."
- We could acknowledge God but close ourselves off to the Spirit of God.
- We could use God to attain public esteem.
- Displaying a virtuous image could be more important than being virtuous.

And, because of this self-centeredness, egoism and pride, we become unwilling to conform our lives to the Will of God.



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My friends, today's message ought to make us uncomfortable.

- Jesus is telling us to reverse every value that turns our life into an ego trip.
- He is telling us to conform our value system to the Will of God.
- He is telling us to acknowledge our human frailty, our ongoing sinfulness, our need for forgiveness.
- He is telling us to abandon all traces of the holier-than-thou, know-it-all attitude of self-righteousness.

My friends we are all in this together. THE TEST OF TRUE,
AUTHENTIC RELIGION IS HOW SENSITIVE IT MAKES ME TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE
AROUND ME! THE TEST OF TRUE, AUTHENTIC RELIGION IS HOW SENSITIVE IT
MAKES ME TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE AROUND ME!

As a community of believers we come together each week to acknowledge that **each of us** plays a vital role in God's Divine Plan for the Kingdom.



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As a community of believers, **each of us** has a vital role in achieving the Number One priority in life as a Christian People:

“COME, YOU WHOM MY FATHER HAS BLESSED, TAKE FOR YOUR HERITAGE THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU, FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD, THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME DRINK, A STRANGER AND YOU MADE ME WELCOME, SICK AND YOU VISITED ME.” (Mt. 25:34-36).

Friends, fellow Christians, with a song of praise on our lips, and the Love of Christ in our hearts, let us go forth from here, **not telling** but **doing**—for LOVE, is something you **do**!