

You guys might be wondering how the readings we just heard are connected to each other. Just hearing them without spending any time thinking about them, they seem more disconnected than usual—even the first reading and the gospel which are usually the two that match up. If we are thinking there is a disconnect—and I'm using the word "we" deliberately because I thought the same thing the first time I looked at the readings—if we are thinking the readings don't match up, it's because we have fallen into the same trap as Peter and so many others who recognized Jesus as the Christ, the anointed one, the messiah, and thought they knew what that meant.

The Jews were expecting a messiah to come and rescue them but what they expected was a political messiah who would come in triumph and right every wrong and restore justice, drive out the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and all other foreign occupiers and restore the kingdom of David. Jesus did come to establish a new kingdom but it's the heavenly kingdom of his father. He did come to rescue us but he came to rescue us from slavery to the devil and sin. But he never planned to do it with armies of angels or even armies of human followers; he came to do it through suffering and death.

The first reading is from the suffering servant section of Isaiah. Jesus is that suffering servant; he was reminding the disciples and us of that in the second part of today's gospel. It is through his suffering that we are redeemed. He paid the price for all the sins of humanity. It is through his suffering that the heavenly kingdom of God has been opened to us— but we have to do our part. We have to live our lives according to the commandments. When we fail we have to seek reconciliation—with God and with each other. Having been given the gift of redemption and having been given so many other gifts from the hands of God we can do less than pass those gifts along to others.

This is how the letter of Saint James fits in. Our works can be understood as a participation in the suffering of Christ. James uses the example of a person asking for help because he or she doesn't have food or clothing. Telling that person to go and keep warm and eat isn't helpful. The expectation is that we will concretely do something to help that person out. This requires sacrifice and when we offer that sacrifice in connection with the suffering of Jesus, we are sharing in his work of redemption.

I'm deliberately using the word redemption, not salvation. Have you ever been asked, "have you been saved?" The correct response to that question is "I have been redeemed; I have been justified. Jesus has paid the price for my sins. My salvation is still a work in progress." Jesus paid the price but now I have to

live my life in a certain manner according to the commandments of God. It is possible for us to be redeemed yet still miss out on being saved. Just because Jesus paid the price for our sins that doesn't mean we can go around doing whatever we want; we have to live our lives in the light of Christ and walk according to the path he has set for us.

Going back to Faith and works. Sometimes this relationship is seen as putting a wedge between Saint James and Saint Paul, but Paul can actually help us understand the relationship better. Paul does write about the necessity of faith in Jesus in order for our sins to be forgiven, but things don't stop there. Throughout his letters, Paul writes about how, having come to faith in Christ's gospel, our lives must be totally transformed. We can no longer live in the darkness of sin. He also writes that having undergone this interior conversion, it has to be reflected in our exterior lives. His hymn to charity in the First Letter to the Corinthians is a prime example of this. Paul writes: "If I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." In other words, faith without love is dead...and how do we best demonstrate love? Through our works.

Again we find this in Paul's hymn to charity. When he says love is patient, love is kind, the Greek words for patient and kind are not adjectives, they are verbs; the closest we can come in English is to say something like love is actively patient, love is actively kind. The word Paul used for love is agape—the sacrificial love demonstrated by Jesus when he died for us on the Cross. Paul is telling us that love is not just a feeling that we have that we can keep to ourselves; authentic sacrificial love must be acted upon.

A concrete way of bringing our faith to life is through service to our parish community. Volunteer as a lector or an usher or an altar server. Help out with the youth groups or religious Ed classes. Volunteer with one of the ministries listed on the front of the bulletin. Demonstrate your faith through your works.

Faith without works is dead. The danger of that statement is that it can lead us to becoming an activist church in which our primary focus is on service. Our works must never become separated from our faith. We must never forget the heart of everything the church is and everything that church does is right now contained in the Tabernacle. The heart of the church is the Eucharist; Jesus himself. Everything we do begins and ends with him. The reason why our faith must express itself through works is that it is through our works that Jesus is carried out into the world. Having heard the word of God proclaimed in the

readings and having received the Body of Christ in Holy Communion we become living tabernacles and our duty is to carry Jesus out into the world. I think this best summed up in the pray of Saint John Henry Newman...

Dear Lord:

Help me to spread your fragrance wherever I go. Flood my soul with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through me, and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only you, O Lord! Stay with me, then I shall begin to shine as you do; so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Lord, will be all from you; none of it will be mine; it will be you shining on others through me. Let me thus praise you in the way you love best, by shining on those around me. Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by my example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what I do, the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you. Amen