

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Theme: "BE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DELUDING YOURSELVES"- James1:22

God willing, we will celebrate Labor Day tomorrow. As we all know, Labor Day is a day to celebrate the great women and men who fought for the rights of workers in the labor movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through their sacrifice for what is right for workers and their families, we have benefits like a 40-hour work week, paid time off, sick leave, and safer working conditions. We thank God for workers. We pray God's blessings upon all workers and their families. We also pray for fair remuneration and good working conditions for them. We pray God will continue to bless those on retirement also. May they continue to enjoy their well-deserved retirement. For those who have passed on to the Lord, eternal rest be granted to them. Amen!

I prefer The New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition's translation of James 1:22. It reads: "BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS WHO DECEIVE THEMSELVES."

In other words, hearing the word of God is not enough if it is not put into daily practice. Practice what you preach. St. James teaches us some practical ways of living the word of God in every life, namely: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world." Taking care of the orphans and widows, meaning taking care of the oppressed, the sick, prisoners, homeless people, etc. is the natural means of practicing Christian charity in every community. If we fail to take care of these people that the world overlooks, we are NOT practicing true religion. We are deceiving ourselves, as St. James reminds us in the second reading.

We hear in the Gospel reading that Jesus challenges his opponents, the Pharisees and Scribes, for substituting their human traditions for divine commandments. Remember, washing of hands is not for hygienic purposes. Rather, it is for the purpose of ritual purification. The Pharisees look at evils/sins that it come from outside them. So, when they encounter Gentiles, they consider them sinners, unclean people, and they must purify themselves. This explains why they have an elaborate ritual purification practice. Jesus proved them wrong. For Jesus and his heavenly Father, what is most important is a clean mind and heart, not the washing of hands (clean hands). Hence, Jesus pointed to them and all of us, the main source of our sins/evils emanate from our heart. It is what is within us, not from outside us, that adversely affects our words, actions, and thoughts. As Jesus put so beautifully: "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within, and they defile." Once we are aware of the sources of sins/evils are within us, then we must try to get rid of them from our heart/within us. This calls for a constant and continued transformation of our entire life, mind, body, and soul. By doing that, we are purifying and cleaning our entire life.

In the first reading, Moses admonished his people to be faithful to God's law which is not a burden but the main source of life and wisdom. Unfortunately, they added more laws to what Moses urged them to follow, hence lost their spiritual usefulness. This is what Jesus is trying to teach and correct the Pharisees and the Scribes.

During this week, may each one of us ask herself/himself, AM I A DOER OF THE WORD OF GOD OR HEARER OF THE WORD OF GOD? We must be both. That is, WE MUST HEAR AND LIVE THE WORD OF GOD IN OUR DAILY LIFE.

Again, fellow parishioners it is not enough to hear the Word of God and not practice it. When we hear the Word of God, we must put into practice daily. Then we become true followers of Christ.

You all have a happy and blessed Labor Day!