

HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

Thank you, God, for today's second reading! Thank you for the Apostle St James' point blank spiritual "smack down" on apathy and inaction. Consider again the following words from James 2:

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:14-17)



St. James tell us that there is no justification for the one who does not respond to the material needs of others; it doesn't matter why we don't do it- apathy, fear, laziness, business, etc... all that matters is that inaction in the face of "the needs of the body" renders our faith lifeless. A lifeless faith will not save anyone. We know that our Catholic faith is not a matter of mere intellectual assent. Ours is a living faith, a faith that must be demonstrated in actions, that is, in words, in thoughts, and in the deeds that feed the body, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

St. James asks us why we think that our intellectual assent to the truth is not enough. He asks us why we think the Church is a club we are supposed to belong to, pay our dues, and show up to meetings. He asks us why we think it is enough that we believe in the things that are right- as though this life is for the purpose of answering a true or false morality quiz. It's a fair question. In my experience, we Catholics love to use these words of James 2 in a rhetorical defense of our theology of justification. Do we love them as much when it is time to do them?

Obviously, we do not actually think that the purpose of this life is to answer a true or false quiz, nor do we desire simply to know and assent to the truth. We are embodied; we are creatures, and we desire to use our bodies to live out and act out the truth of what our intellect tells us. We desire to use our bodies to build the Kingdom of God. We do not simply build the Kingdom of God with our souls; we must also employ our physical strength to the task of meeting the "needs of the body." God created us body and soul, so that we would be able to give and receive love in a physical way. God allows some to experience the "needs of the body" so that a demand will be placed on others to use their bodies in loving service.

St. John Paul II shows us in his masterpiece called "Men and Women He Created Them - a Theology of the Body," that we are dignified children of God whose bodies are beautifully created by God with a divine design (plan) in mind. He points out that the visible creature can help the world understand the reality of the invisible. The pope also points out that is vitally important to live out of the understanding of our great dignity and treat others with the same understanding of their dignity. Part of this is caring for the poor and sharing our faith lovingly with others. It is also faithfully incorporating our sexuality and living it out in conformity of God's original design and plan for us. This is living out faithfully the beauty and love God wants to share with us.

Our Catholic faith is not meant to be merely believed, but lived, which means that it is only fully received through example. It is good for us to take to heart the words of the Apostle James, not so much on the level of our agreement with them, but on the level of our obeying them because they point to the reality of the dignity of the human person. The failure to heed these words would be to disembody our Catholic faith. To faithfully allow these words to convert our hearts will be the incarnation of our faith and the realization of God's desire to bring about redemption in and through our whole being, body and soul.



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