

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2023 A

Each year, in the daily prayer of the Church, we read a passage from an anonymous preacher from the second century; and each year, these words prod my conscience – just as they were intended to do. This unnamed homilist told the disciples of his day: *“When they hear the words of God on our lips, unbelievers are amazed at their beauty and power; but when they see that these words have no effect in our lives, their admiration turns to scorn, and they dismiss such words as myths and fairy tales. They listen, for example, when we tell them that God tells us to love our enemies. They are full of admiration at such extraordinary virtue. But when they observe that we not only fail to love our enemies, but even those who love us, they laugh at the Gospel, and the Name of Christ is blasphemed.”*

We recognize that the conflict between what believers say and what we do is not new; it remains a constant part of the human aspect of the Church. The Scriptures we just heard need little explanation – they are transparent and practical: *“Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own.”* Both Isaiah and Jesus urge us to DO these things, rather than simply admire them, if faith is to bear fruit – not for our glory, but to reassure others of God’s mercy. Such kindness sounds beautiful and noble in the abstract, but putting this into practice can be complicated and we can easily feel overwhelmed. ***But the vast scale of human need is not an excuse for us to do nothing at all.*** I find myself so often returning to the words of St. Teresa of Kolkata: “None of us can do everything, but all of us can do something.” Our “something” will not resolve the problems of the world, or even of another person ... but it WILL make the world a better place, adding one more positive to counteract all the negatives that surround us.

One of the characters of a Charles Dickens novel suffered from what he called [*quote*] “telescopic charity – she could not love anyone less than ten thousand miles away.” Of course, true concern for those who are far away is part of the universal love Jesus calls us to have, members of the one Body of Christ. But that

concern cannot be in place of the people we actually see and live with each day. It will always be easier to love those far away from us, when we get to decide the limits of our own charity and do not have to get involved beyond what we desire. ***But our Christian love truly grows when we are measure our giving, not by how much we prefer to offer, but by what others actually need.*** And it not always money they need – but kindness, presence, patience, acceptance, at times challenge and encouragement. We may struggle to live out these ideals; but when Jesus tells us “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” we learn even from our struggles what is needed for true human happiness.

When a deacon is ordained, the Bishop hands him the Book of Gospels and tells him: Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach. Those words are a guide for every disciple, to live ***a life where prayer and life become one – to read the Gospel, to believe it as the true path to joy, and then to proclaim it by bringing it off the page and into life.*** The good that we do is not so we are noticed and praised, but ideally that GOD is noticed, and praised. In honor of the Trinity, choose three intentional things to do this week that demonstrate that we believe what we read; teach what we believe ... and most important, ***practice what we teach.***