

Ninth Sunday of Year A/2008

We all know people who are keen to talk and speak with beautiful words, providing theories and principles, explaining in many ways how society, family, and the world should be. But when it comes to put into practice what they teach, they fall short to the point that a gap exists between their sayings and their deeds. It is against such a situation today's readings are inviting us to reflect on.

In the first reading, Moses reminds the people of Israel the Covenant they made with God. He recommends them not to forget the word of the Lord, but instead to put it into their hearts and their minds, to make the observance of the statutes and decrees of the Lord the objective of their life.

However, the Israelites are free to act according to the word of the Lord and his statutes, or not. Two ways are open to them, namely the way of blessing and happiness, and the way of curse and unhappiness. It depends on them, and on them alone, to choose and opt for what is right in order to live.

Here, we see how God is respectful of human freedom, how he does not force our hand in order to bring us to believe or to respect his Law. God's respect toward us is, however, a challenge because there is always a danger that we turn our freedom into licentiousness. For that reason, we have to understand that we are responsible for our eternal salvation or perdition. Another thing we learn from the text is that because God respects our freedom, we too must respect others' freedom of decision and choice while we strive to help them not to turn their freedom into permissiveness, and even prison.

All that helps us understand the urgency of Jesus' message in today's Gospel. First of all, Jesus warns us against false pretenses. For Jesus, indeed, it is a dangerous game to be content with simply citing his name without doing his Father's will. Such a game will lead in the end to our condemnation and rejection.

The only way we can prove our faithfulness and sincerity is our practice. We have to put into practice the recommendations of Jesus, and everything that he teaches us. That is why fine words can never be taken as a substitute for our deeds. It is like saying that we love someone and at the same time we keep doing things that break that person's heart. What counts most before God are not our repeated words, so beautiful they might be, but our effort to live by his word, as challenging as it might be.

As you can see, there is an invitation here that we take a close look at our personal life and our way of being Christian. Why all this? Behind this passage, there is an idea of judgment. Time will come where we have to be accountable before the Lord. We may perhaps deceive others with our words, but we cannot deceive God.

Then, we understand why Jesus compares the listener who puts his words into practice to a wise man who has founded his house on a rock, and the one who does the contrary to the unwise who builds his house on the sand. The rock gives to the house a solid foundation, and the sand a shakable foundation. Rock and sand are the symbol of where we stand in our life of faith. Rock and sand

account for the way we react to Jesus' message. Listening and practicing go together when it is about faith. Hearing and doing are summed up together. There cannot be one without the other. Where people care only for listening, and neglect practicing, there is a risk of being surprised at the end of the race.

To put it in other words, let us say that only a house whose foundations are firm can withstand the storm. And only a life whose foundations are sure can stand the test. In order to fulfill such a requirement, Jesus asks of us only two things, namely listening and acting.

Why listening? One of the difficulties we face today as society is that we are invaded by such a mass of information that we run the risk of equating everything. The result in the end is that we relativize everything. That relativism, in turn, affects our way of hearing. In other words, we listen to everything to the point of losing the sense of concept of priority. Jesus wants us to give priority to his word; to listen to it before we listen to other things.

However, listening is not enough; we should also act. Why acting? As a matter of fact, knowledge becomes relevant only when it is transmitted into action. Theory becomes meaningful only when it becomes practice or when it is put into experience. Otherwise, it is like consulting a physician for a disease and, then, neglecting to take the medication he has prescribed. In such a case, there is no healing at all.

All that brings us to St Paul who tells us that we are all sick; we are all sinners. We have been justified gratuitously by God who gave us his Son, Jesus to be our savior. Even when we are asked to act and produce deeds, we should not forget that the initiative of our salvation comes from God.

God acts before we do anything good ourselves. He was the first to love us by sending Jesus who died on the cross for our salvation. We better listen to Jesus and put into practice what he recommends us. May God bless you as you strive to do his will in your life! May he always lead you to live by his word!

Deut 11, 18, 26-28, 32; Romans 3, 21-25, 28; Matthew 7, 21-27



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