

THE TRUE DISCIPLE LISTENS & ACTS ON JESUS' WORDS

June 1, 2008

Ninth Ordinary Sunday

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"I live, no, it is not I, but Christ lives in me." [Galatians 2:20]

A. DEUTERONOMY 11:18,26-28,32 -- The Context. This book covers events at the end of 40 years of wandering as Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land. It was written to mind the people of God's great love for them and that they must chose fidelity to the covenant in order to reap the benefits. **In today's portion** Moses pronounces a blessing on the people if they keep the Law and a curse on them if they disobey it. [TCB 200, RG. p. 81]

B. PSALM 31:2-4,17,25 --The Context This is a lament with **a strong emphasis on trust in God.** [TCB p 665]

C. ROMANS 3:21-25,28—The Context: This letter was written by Paul around 56-58 A.D from Greece to stress salvation and justification through faith in Christ. **Today's text** provides a clear statement of Paul's "gospel," i.e. the principle of justification by faith in Christ. God has found a means of rescuing humanity from its desperate plight through what Paul calls the righteousness of God. **Divine mercy declares the guilty innocent and makes them so.** God does this not as a result of the law but apart from it and **not through any merit in human beings but through forgiveness of their sins.** This signals a new era in human history. [TCB p. 235]

D. MATTHEW 7:21-27--The Context: Matthew was a Greek speaking Jewish convert living at the end of the first century in Antioch, Syria and writing to a Jewish audience around 70-90 A.D. **Today's pericope** is from the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which he defines a **true disciple as one who listens to His words and acts on them.**

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

The whole of the Sermon on the Mount has been **about the essential qualities to be found in the disciple of Jesus.** He or she is not to be measured simply by what they do and say, however religious or "holy" they seem to be. It is not enough, for instance, to keep saying "Lord, Lord..." That by itself will not bring a person under the kingship of God. Translating that into contemporary terms, it means that **just spending a lot of time in church, being regularly at Sunday Mass, going on pilgrimages, joining in novenas, saying rosaries does not necessarily make one the kind of disciple that Jesus is looking for.** Church-going and discipleship are not synonymous.

Something more is required of the true disciple. He or she is someone who is totally united to God in heart, soul and mind. We can say a lot of prayers and be very busy doing the Lord's work and yet not be such a person. The problem is that such persons do not really have "the mind of Christ", **they do not think like Christ nor have they totally submitted themselves to his way of seeing and doing things.** They are not really in touch with his will because they are so busy talking (even to him) and doing that they have never really listened. At the end of time when they come face to face with the Lord he will not recognize them. "You **did your (holy) thing** but you were **not doing mine.**"

The true disciple, Jesus tells us, is one who listens to Jesus' words and carries them out. What do we mean by "listening" to Jesus? I suggest that it includes four interacting qualities:

1. **HEARING. We have to hear what Jesus is saying. We can only do that by being in touch with the Word of God which we find above all in the scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments but especially the latter.** Many Christians, sadly many of them Catholics, have a very scant knowledge of God's Word in the Bible. They seldom, if ever, open the book, that is, if they have one at all. They may feel that the "catechism" they were taught in school is all they need. Even otherwise highly educated people have only the scantiest awareness of the dynamics of the Gospel message.

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2. UNDERSTANDING. We need to understand what we hear and read in the Word of God. It is very possible to hear (e.g. during the Mass readings) or read (privately) and not understand the inner meaning. **This understanding does not come without some effort. It is dangerous to read and interpret the Bible without guidance.** Without someone to guide us, it is difficult for us to access the fuller meaning of what we are being told. It is very easy to distort the meaning or to make the text say something it . There are now plenty of books and courses available to guide us and open the scriptures for us.

3. ACCEPT & ASSIMILATE. We need to accept fully and to assimilate into our very being what we have come to understand. It is possible to hear well, to understand clearly but not to accept or assimilate. Children and teenagers do that all the time! **We have not reached full discipleship until the thinking of Christ becomes our own.** It was put marvelously by Paul when he said, *"I live, no, it is not I, but Christ lives in me."*

4. ACT ACCORDINGLY. When, like Paul, we have fully assimilated as part of our own thinking what we have heard and understood, we will naturally act accordingly. It will not be possible to act otherwise. **His will and mine totally coincide; his vision and mine are exactly the same.** So, contrary to what many people feel, being a Christian and following the Gospel is not as difficult as it sometimes seems. It is not a question of will power. **It is a question of seeing things in the same way as the Gospel.** When we see life and relationships the way the Gospel does, our behavior is likely to follow quite naturally. It is only when all this becomes a reality in our lives that we can say we are truly disciples of Jesus.

Paul in the Second Reading from the letter to the Romans raises another important element. What was originally given to the Israelites through the Law and the Prophets is now extended to everyone without exception as a gift of love through the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Under the old Law, it was believed that salvation came through one's keeping of the Law's requirements. Under the New Law, we have all been saved through Christ who won reconciliation with God for us through his life, death and resurrection.

We become right with God by our total commitment in faith to Jesus Christ and not by our own efforts. **The good that we do is done only through God's loving gift.** As one of the Weekday Prefaces puts it: "You have no need of our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace through Jesus Christ our Lord." Or, as Paul puts it today, "one is justified [that is, **made right with God**] **by faith and trust in him and not by doing something the Law tells him to do**".

It is important for us to understand this in the context of today's Gospel reading. **When we become disciples of Christ and live the life he calls us to, we do that, not on the basis of our own efforts, but in response to his coming into our lives.** All we do, we do "through him, with him and in him".

To live a Christian life only on the surface, that is, only with words and externally conforming behavior, is like building a house on sand. Once we come under attack, we will collapse because we have no deep foundation inside. We see that happening frequently when people who have lived in an outwardly Christian environment move to a purely secular situation. They fall away very quickly.

So let us become like that sensible man who builds his house on rock. The Rock is the firm foundation that is Christ, together with the vision of Christ which becomes also the vision that guides our own life, a life built on truth and love.

"Don't swear falsely! Carry out what you vow." It was common in Jesus' time for people to guarantee the truth of what they said by making a solemn oath before God. Jesus' point is that a good Christian does not have to swear at all, because a true Christian is a reliable and totally

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honest person. **He or she is a person of integrity. Such people can be trusted when they speak.** They don't have to give external guarantees. Their 'Yes' or 'No' means what is said and there are no mental reservations. It is pleasure to meet people like that who are totally transparent and have nothing to hide.

There are not a few Catholics who feel that if they just keep the Commandments they are good Catholics. They often like to ask, "Is this a sin?", that is, is it against the law? Is it a mortal sin or is it a venial sin? If it is "only" a venial sin, then I can do it.

But true Christians do not ask whether something is legal or illegal. They love God, they love Jesus, they love their brothers and sisters. Their only concern is how they can serve and love them more and more. They want to work with Jesus and with his brothers and sisters to build the Kingdom of God. No matter how much they do, they know they can still love more and do more and be more. It is not a question of law; it is not a question of what I have to do. **It is a question of how much more I can do, how much more I want to do.** The requirements of the law are way behind. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Do I regularly read and study God's word in the Scriptures? If not, when will I start to do so?

Do I try to act and think each day as Jesus would think and act, love and serve?

Do I make acts of gratitude for the Spirit's inspirations to me to do good works?

Do I seek to put on the mind of Christ through daily prayer, study and reflection?

[Sources: Scripture readings- *The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG)*; *The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]* Jewish Publication Society; *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)* 1968 edition; *Dictionary of the Bible (DB)*, J.L.McKenzie, SJ; *Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS), Wm Barclay*; *Sunday Scripture Reflections* by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; 9th Ordinary Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].