



Come and See!

September 16, 2018

The Word...

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.
Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works."
Demonstrate your faith to me without works,
and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.
(Jas 2:14-18)

Pondering the Word...

Last evening, I attended a Commissioning Mass for members of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC)* in Baltimore, Maryland (US). I am blessed to serve as a spiritual guide for this group, and was commissioned as well. This rite came at a very important time for me.

Regardless of the chaos enveloping both my country and my church these days, it is essential I stay focused on what it means to be a Christian. I remind myself each morning that my faith is not in institutions or governments. My faith is in Christ, and I am called directly by him to reach out to those who are wounded by poverty, oppression, and abuse; those whose bodily and spiritual needs are not met.

My own need for personal prayer has increased recently, I guess as a way to shield my soul from the bitterness that could easily overtake it. But I can't go into hiding either. Christ calls us from our places of protection to reach out to those in most need of his compassionate presence.

This passage from James comes at an important time as well, as does this Wednesday's reading from First Corinthians: *"If I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."* (13:2) If we want to keep our faith alive, let us turn to those in need--without judgment, without bias—to see Christ's face in them and allow them to feel Christ's love from us.

Living the Word...

It's one thing for Christians to buck the increasingly greed-focused, nationalistic climates in countries around the world these days (although many do not); it's another for those whose churches are in crisis (and that's not just the Roman church) to stand up despite the sins and ethical compromises and capitulations of our leaders. But this is the time when grassroots efforts are essential. I'm not talking about protests and boycotts although there is a place for that. It is time for us to show the world the true, un-politicized meaning of our faith.

This is particularly important in the example we set for our children and young people. Even if you chose to forgo religious practice, you can still stay close to Christ by finding him in the very people and places he told us we would find him: in the poor, in prisons; in the elderly, in hospices; in the refugee, in the stranger (Mt 25:35-36), and then reflecting on your service in prayer. I encourage all of us: Give. Don't give up.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Sep 17: *"I hear when you meet as a Church there are divisions among you, and to a degree I believe it; there have to be factions among you in order that those who are approved among you may become known."* (1 Cor 11:17-26, 33)

The roots of clericalism were there at the start. It's not a surprise—Paul's bias for hierarchy has guided much of the top-down, patriarchal structure of the church. But read further: He chastises the leaders (and the wealthy) for not reaching out to those who have neither standing nor resources. And let's not forget the words of Jesus: *"Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave..."* (Mt 20:26-27) Something for our shepherds to revisit and renew in their lives.

Sep 18: *"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body...and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of it."* (1 Cor 12: 12-14, 27-31)

I'm fascinated by the study of immunology. While many substances used in this kind of treatment are made in a lab, there is a type that uses cells from another part of the person's body to heal the part that is ailing. I don't imagine Paul ever dreamed of such a metaphor but I think he would delight in it now. The Body of Christ is made up of everyone, not just our family or parish community. We can't heal all that ails our world but we can look beyond ourselves to share our health to strengthen those who are ailing around us. If more of us would take up residence in the heart of Christ, just imagine the healing presence we could offer!

Sep 19: *"To what shall I compare this generation? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.'"* (Lk 7:31-35)

Two of the New Testament translations I consult use the phrase "accost each other" to describe the squabbles over the ministerial approaches of John the Baptist and Jesus. It seems that from time eternal we have been dissatisfied, using the marketplace to air our grievances and attack the other side. We surely see this happening today, and the squabbles grow increasingly violent. Jesus tells us Wisdom will prevail and we will come to see that, if the goal is truth, we will be able to integrate different approaches; we will all focus on the same end, rather than getting caught up in the means. Do you find yourself drawn these kinds of arguments? Perhaps one way to settle things down is to find common ground by agreeing on the ultimate goal. Say a quick prayer any time you find yourself drawn into "the marketplace" of debate.

Sep 20: *"For I am the least of the Apostles...because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective."* (1 Cor 15:1-11)

Whenever this reading appears in the lectionary, I'm compelled to include it. I think it's such a good reminder for all of us. 'I was—I am—a sinner, but God's grace redeems me. And my thanks to God for his grace is to use it as an invitation that others might accept that grace as well.' *"By the grace of God, I am what I am."* AMEN! Let's recite this every morning so we become more effective in our work for God's Kingdom!

Sep 21: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork...Not a word nor a discourse whose voice is not heard. Through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message. (Ps 19)*

I went on retreat recently, and a comment from the retreat leader really stuck with me: "If you want to know how much God loves you, just look around." The psalmist is reminding us God's glory is evident every day in the rising and setting of the sun. We don't need big events or dramatic proof—the heavens declare it unceasingly. We so often take God and God's gifts to us for granted. Stop to look around today and feel God's love and presence surrounding and embracing you!

Sep 22: *"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."* (1 Cor 15: 35-37, 42-49)

Paul is addressing the resurrection of the body. I remember a debate concerning the literal translation of this passage. One participant asked (tongue-in-cheek), 'Well, do I get to choose the age of my body that resurrects?' I thought to myself: 'What age of my natural body would I pick to resurrect?' Probably somewhere in my twenties, I'd say. Then it occurred to me: 'So, what was the state of your spiritual body at that time? ... hmmm ...okay, never mind.' We are told we are dust and unto dust we will return. But we are also formed in love—the loving image of a merciful God—and unto that love we will return as well. Don't fret about mysteries we can't understand. God brings each one of us home when our spirits are most ready to be with him.