

HOMILY for 22nd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's Gospel talks to us about building up a sincere & heartfelt relationship with Lord to avoid being a hypocrite. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A devout Jew, Mrs. Feinstein offered up her prayers every week in temple. One week she prayed especially fervently. "Lord, I have always been a good Jew, & I've had a good life. I only have one complaint. I'm poor. Please Lord, let me win the lottery."

The next week, Mrs. Feinstein was a little more strident. "Lord," she prayed, "have I ever missed a High Holy Day? Have I not fasted every Yom Kippur? Why must I go to my grave a pauper? One lottery win is all I'm asking You for."

The third week Mrs. Feinstein made no bones about her displeasure. "A faithful Jew such as myself, Lord, always observant, always dutiful, asks for one little favor, & what do I get?"

A glowing, white-bearded figure stepped down from the Heavens into the temple. "Now Mrs. Feinstein," boomed God, "don't you think you could at least meet halfway, & buy a ticket?"

Anyway, if there was a group of people that Jesus despised the most, it would be hypocrites. But, He is not the only one who feels that way. In fact, most people do not like hypocrites because they say one thing & then do another. Or, here is how Jesus put it in today's Gospel, "...How accurately Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites when he wrote: 'This people pays me lip service, but their heart is far from me. Empty is the reverence they do me because they teach as dogmas mere human precepts.' You disregard God's Commandment & cling to what is human tradition." So, Jesus seems to condemn hypocrites because they talk the talk, but they do not walk the walk. They also have the wrong focus as they ignore God's Commandments while emphasizing human tradition. As you can see, hypocrites do not only pay lip service but also act blindly in their daily life. How can we avoid the hypocritical acts & do what Jesus would want us to do?

First & foremost, we need to cleanse our heart daily & try to get rid of all the evil thoughts & desires. When we do that, we deny the power of darkness the opportunity to mislead us & influence us in the wrong way. We basically immunize ourselves spiritually from evil influences & avoid the hypocrite virus. Jesus explains this good habit & encourages us to keep it up as the following in today's Gospel: "...Hear me, all of you, & try to understand. Nothing that enters a person from outside can make him/her impure; that which comes out of him/her, & only that, constitutes impurity... Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, & an obtuse spirit. All these evils come from within render a person impure." When our heart is free of those bad thoughts & evil desires, we do not talk one way & then act another way. There is only one way that we should live by & follow it all the times, that is, God's way.

Now we know how to keep ourselves from the wrong & evil way. Next, we need to fill our heart with more good thoughts & godly desires. It begins with a good prayer life & a virtuous way of life. A good prayer life will help strengthen our relationship with God & keep the power of darkness & its evil influences away from us. It helps us find the wisdom of God &

stay connected to God at all times. It prepares us to desire & follow a life of virtues such as Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-Control, & Chastity. Those virtues/fruits of the Holy Spirit would transform us to be like our God & help us avoid acting like a hypocrite. In fact, Moses in today's First Reading gives us one more reason to keep up our virtuous way of life as following: "...Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom & intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes & say, 'This great nation is truly a wise & intelligent people.'" That is what a life of virtues can do beyond a person & produce for a nation.

Finally, if we would like to avoid acting like a hypocrite, we must learn to be doers & practice what we talk. When we have the courage to do more & talk less, we'll truly live out God's will & have more compassion & understanding toward the people around us. St. Paul has this advice for us in today's Second Reading, "Dearest brothers & sisters,... Be doers of the Word & not hearers only, deluding yourselves. Religion that is pure & undefiled before God & the Father is this: to care for orphans & widows in their affliction & to keep oneself unstained by the world." Evidently St. Paul thinks that if we care for orphans & widows in their afflictions, we will give a wonderful testimony to our Christian religion. He is absolutely right about that. In fact, our Lord Jesus spent over eighty percent of His ministry doing something for the people of God such as healing the afflicted & feeding the hungry. He only used less than twenty percent of His ministry to teach them parables & the Beatitudes.

For years, the Church has followed our Lord's example & spent most of its time & resources to feed the poor & the hungry at God's kitchens, heal the sick & the hungry at Christian hospitals, & counsel the troubled at counseling centers. That is what I love the most about our Christian/Catholic faith. We know how to balance between talking about our Christian/Catholic faith to the world & doing lots of good deeds to serve the needy. Some Christians think that Jesus has given us our salvation freely; & we have not done anything to earn it. They are right about that. However, the best way to make sure that we would follow that path of salvation all the way to the end is to do lots of good deeds every day. That is how we would hold ourselves accountable as Christians. Otherwise, we might preach one thing about our Christian faith & then do another thing in real life. That is how two versions of ourselves might appear in reality.

My dear brothers & sisters, we Christians are often accused of being a hypocrite. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus shows us how that accusation can come true if we keep on acting like the scribes & Pharisees. These folks only honored the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. By doing lots of good deeds every day & following a virtuous way of life, we would avoid that label & show the world what it means to be a Christian/Catholic. Moreover, we would help the world realize what a blessing it is to have Christians in this life.