

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 27, 2020

It is not the tongue in your mouth that tells the most about you, but the tongue in your shoe.

Throughout the Gospels there seems to be one type of person that really upsets Jesus: the hypocrite and self-righteousness person. A hypocrite is a person that is more concerned with a good image instead of good conscience – a person that works harder at creating an impression than knowing their true convictions or beliefs. A self-righteous person is someone who knows all the answers and they refuse to consider another perspective. They are right all the time on all topics – thus the description: self-righteous . . . such as the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said: *“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them”* (Mt 23:4). *“You pay tithes of mint, dill and cumin yet neglect the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy . . .”* (Mt 23:23). *“You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence.* (Mt 23:25).

In today’s gospel Jesus is addressing those Pharisees, the chief priest and elders – encouraging them to reconsider what they believe and why they believe and in whom they believe – after ignoring the preaching of John the Baptist and missing the works of God in their midst!

Today’s Gospel is part of chapter 21 of Matthew in which Jesus is approaching Jerusalem - this is where our Palm Sunday readings begin - with Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey with a large crowd. People were treating Jesus like a king. Recall that is when Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers in the temple. And the chief priests feel their power is being threatened by Jesus.

The following day the Pharisees, chief priests and elders confront Jesus about who he thinks he is to upset the normal, comfortable life of Jerusalem. So Jesus uses parables to demonstrate that God’s ways are different than our normal comfortable ways.

Today, we have two sons – neither of whom is perfect – who are asked to work in the vineyard. One son said yes but then did nothing – yet he is seen by the chief priests and elders as the better of the two sons solely because of appearances. This son did not appear to disrespect his father and the family name – it was all about appearances and hypocrisy. *(For a better understanding*

of this parable and who the chief priests sided with, see the Bible footnotes for Mt. 21:28–32 (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/21>)

The other son who at first said no, but then changed his mind and did the work, is seen as the worst because he disrespected his father. But Jesus holds this son who changed his mind as the better of two sons because he recognized the error of his ways.

Then Jesus declares that prostitutes and tax collectors will enter the kingdom of heaven before the hypocrites and self-righteous – because although they were once sinful, they listened to John the Baptist. They heard the call of Jesus to follow him and they changed their lives . . . think of the woman at the well . . . Zacchaeus the tax collector who climbed the sycamore tree . . . even Saul the terrorist of Christians became Paul – the greatest influence on the spread of Christianity – all changed their hearts and their ways.

So what do these readings mean for us?

First, today is World Day of Migrants and Refugees – those people who have been displaced and have no home because of poverty, war and, yes, even COVID-19 pandemic. Pope Francis has challenged every Catholic to learn to avoid self-centeredness, jealousy and division and work toward international cooperation leaving no one excluded. We are challenged by this gospel to reflect on our personal convictions of homeless people who seek a better life. As Jesus said: What is your opinion?

Secondly, what about the protests, marches and demonstrations that we continue to see on TV? To be clear, not destruction of property or violence, I am talking about the protests. I am a child of the 60's. Watching these protests remind me of the racism I witnessed as a child . . . of the times I participated in racism with a Confederate flag, fascination with Confederate history, the names we used, the ignorance of accepting inequality, the prejudices I and some of my generation inherited and perpetuated. These are uncomfortable memories . . . I have changed . . . but is it enough? Surely our country has changed . . . but is more change needed? Surely things aren't as bad as the protesters say . . . or are they? Are we called to be like the son who said no, but then reconsidered and did as his Father asked?

As Jesus said: What is your opinion . . .