

Actions speak louder than words... You have to practice what you preach... That's the message from Jesus in today's Gospel... And that's the theme of my homily today.... I'm going to start with a story about a guy who was driving along when a car cuts him off, almost driving him off the road... He gets so angry that at the next stop light, he rolls down his window and starts to scream and curse at the idiot driver, ... flips him the bird, and insults the guy's mother... Unfortunately, a cop in a patrol car sees the whole thing, pulls over the angry driver and makes him get out of his car... The guy protests, "Officer, I didn't break any law."... The cop says, "You're right, ... but when I saw the WWJD sticker on your window and the Christian fish symbol on your bumper, and the pro-life license plates, I figured this has gotta be a stolen car." .. That driver's actions said a lot more about him than those Christian symbols plastered all over his car.

Someone may say they're a Christian and look like a Christian, but that doesn't make them one. ... People aren't always what they appear to be... Jesus had very little tolerance for this... In today's Gospel, He comes down hard on the Scribes and Pharisees – the Jewish religious leaders... They talked a good game... They could recite every syllable of the Jewish religious laws, ... and quote every word of Sacred Scripture, and they strutted around adorned with gaudy religious symbols, ... looking so pious and holy. ... But their arrogance and their actions were totally contrary to the image of holiness they tried to project... Jesus warns the people, "Do not follow their example, for they do not practice what they preach." ... Later on in Matt's Gospel, Jesus calls them "hypocrites" seven different times... A hypocrite is someone whose words say one thing and their actions say another... There's nothing Jesus hates more than a religious phony.

Here's a question... What do you think is the #1 reason why some people do not believe in God? ... The eminent theologian Karl Rahner had an answer... He said the #1 cause of atheism is Christians. ... That's what He said... He was referring to people who call themselves Christians but don't follow Jesus Christ in how they live their lives... A Christian missionary once asked Mahatma Gandhi, ... "Mr. Gandhi, you quote the words of Christ so often, why have you not become a Christian?" ... Gandhi replied, "Oh, I don't reject Christianity. I love your Christ... It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Him." ... Ooh, that hurts... But he hit the nail on the head... It's not enough to just call myself a Christian, ... and to wear a cross around my neck... It's not enough to go to church... Going to church doesn't make me a Christian any more than going to the hospital makes me a doctor. ... To be a Christian is to try to be like Christ... to strive to be like the One we say we believe in. He wants us to practice what we preach... He wants our actions to speak louder than our words.

Now, of course, words are very important to our Christian faith... especially the words in the Bible – the inspired Word of God... And no one's words are more meaningful, more profound, and have more effect on the world than the words of Jesus Christ... He never wrote them down; He never wrote a book... Others did that for Him... What He did was travel from town to town speaking, preaching, teaching God's message to all who would listen. ... He spoke powerful words about God's amazing love and unbounded mercy, ... about how we should love God, love one another, and love our enemies, ... about forgiving one another... about caring for the hungry, the needy, ... and much more... But all of those powerful words Jesus used? ... They wouldn't have made even a ripple in the history of the world, ... they would've all been quickly forgotten, ... if He hadn't lived His words, ... if He hadn't lived what He taught and preached. His actions spoke much more loudly than even His words.

And that's what Jesus asks of us... He wants our faith to be more than what we say we believe, ... more than just words in a book... We can read those words day after day, ... hear them proclaimed and preached week after week in this church, ... but we only get to know and understand what they truly mean when we put them into practice, ... In 1 Jn 3:18, ... the writer exhorts the early Christian community, ... "Let us **NOT** love with words or tongue, but with

actions and truth.”...FAITH is not a bunch of words...It is what we do to live out those words...FAITH is not a noun....Faith is a verb! It’s an action. ..It’s what we do!

Earlier in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus told His disciples: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father.”...He’s saying that He wants us to do more than call out to Him and praise Him and pray to Him...He wants us to FOLLOW Him,.. and to do the will of His Father, as He did.

You know, we pray the Our Father – the prayer Jesus taught us – over and over...Do we realize that when we pray: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”,...we’re praying that what God wants to be done on earth will be done....But, we have to do more than pray for it...We have to do our part to make it happen. ..And, come on, we know what God’s will is....what He wants us to do, don’t we?

- We know that God wants us to forgive when someone has hurt us
- We know that God wants us to stay away from situations where we could be tempted to do wrong
- We know that God wants us to stop acting on our prejudices and stop making harsh judgments
- We know what God wants us to do when we have to make a tough moral decision
- We know what God wants us to do when we see people in need of help
- We know that God wants us to read the Bible more and to pray more

We know God’s will...We know what God wants us to do... Yet, there’ll be times when we just don’t want to do it...It’s too hard...or too inconvenient... or we’re not quite ready...Well, Jesus didn’t say, “Do the will of the Father when it’s not too hard,.. when it’s convenient,... when you feel you’re ready,...and you will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”...We might wish He had said that, but He didn’t.

My friends, striving to do the will of God is the bedrock of our faith,...of all that Jesus taught and preached and modeled for us in His life on earth...It is the heart of what being a Christian means...This is what Jesus saw sadly lacking in the Scribes and Pharisees...That’s why He warns us not to follow their way but to follow His way of honoring God by living what we say we believe. ...We will do it imperfectly....We will sometimes fail...But that’s Ok...As long as we keep trying. Then maybe others will see that our FAITH is NOT just words, it’s NOT all show, ...They will see that our FAITH is what we do; it is who we are...And maybe, just maybe, it will draw others to Jesus Christ,...it will inspire others to follow Jesus Christ,...maybe even begin to fill some of the empty seats in our churches.

In a book called *12 Tests of Character*, the author tells about a Turkish soldier who chases a brother and sister down a dead-end street....The brother is shot and killed. Somehow the sister gets away...Some time later, though, she is captured, and because she’s a nurse, she’s forced to work in the enemy’s field hospital....The next day, a badly wounded soldier is brought to the hospital for her to work on....She and the wounded soldier immediately recognized each other. ...He was the one who had killed her brother...Now, she knew that if she didn’t do something for him right away, he would die...But she treated him and nursed him back to health...The soldier later asked her, “Why didn’t you let me die,..Why did you treat me with such kindness and mercy?” ...She answered, “Because I serve the one who said, ‘Love youUr enemies and do them good.’ That is my faith.”...After a moment of silence, the soldier grabbed her hand and said, “Tell me more about your Lord...I would give anything to have a faith like yours.”

In a few min, we will come forward to receive Jesus in Holy Communion.....As we take Jesus, the Living Bread, into ourselves,...to become one with u, let this be our prayer: *Lord Jesus, give*

me the faith, the strength, and the courage to live in a way that draws others to YOU.... AMEN!