

24th Sunday per Annum - B
Isaiah 50: 5-9a;
James 2:14-18;
Mark 8:27-35
Little Flower - 9/12/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings are about faith and good works and the relationship between them. Also, next Sunday is Catechetical Sunday.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asked his disciples, "*Who do people say that I am?*" They responded, "*John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets.*" He then asked them the more critical question, "*But who do you say that I am?*" In other words, Jesus asked them, "Who am I to you?" Peter replied, "*You are the Messiah.*"

Some authors have suggested that there are four stages in the development of our faith. Parents walk with their children on their journey of faith. When we are small children, our faith is the faith we experience in our family. It might be termed familial faith or experiential faith. Little children believe what their parents believe and imitate what their parents do. Therefore, it is important that parents model faith to their small children by their example of prayer and Mass attendance and by having Christian symbols in the home.

As children get older, they become part of the larger community of faith, the faith of the community becomes their faith. Their faith, then, becomes affiliative faith. Therefore, it is important that parents provide their children with formal religious education in a Catholic school or through a religious education program. Our religious education program for students who do not attend Catholic schools takes place on Sunday mornings after the 9:30 a.m. Mass.

Of course, as we all know, as children approach adolescence, they begin to question everything, including their faith. Searching faith can take many different forms, including rejecting faith altogether. Unfortunately, some people never get beyond this phase. This is often the hardest time for parents. What is most important is that parents continue to witness their faith and their values to their children both through their words and actions.

The final stage of faith is personal or owned faith. Those who reach this stage are able to answer Jesus' question in the Gospel, "*But who do you say that I am?*" "Who am I to you?"

One of the great debates between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians is the role of good works in salvation. In fact, as much as Martin Luther believed in biblical faith, he minimized the importance of the Letter of St. James because of what it says about the relationship between faith and good works. Historically, non-Catholic Christians overemphasized faith while Catholics sometimes overemphasized the importance of good works for our salvation. St. James reminds us that it is a matter of both/and rather than either/or.

St. James makes the point that faith that is not lived in good works is dead faith and, therefore, will not save us. What then are good works? The example James uses certainly suggests that good works involve love and service to others. However, good works also include living our relationship with God through prayer and worship as well as avoiding evil and doing good. When St. James wrote, "*I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works,*" he was also reminding us the best way for us to witness to our faith is through good works that flow from our faith.

My brothers and sisters, the end of the Gospel also argues that there is another element to good works: "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*" I would suggest that taking up our cross means that we have to deal with what life deals us with faith and love. Some Christians believe that we need to look for or create crosses. I would suggest there are enough crosses in everyone's life. As Jesus himself said, "*Each day has enough trouble of its own*" [Mt. 6:34]. Today's first reading promises that even during the most difficult times of our lives, God is ever close to us.