

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (2024 - B)

Our Second Reading today is taken from the Letter of Saint James. Its author is believed to be the Apostle James, also known as James the Less. He was the son of Alphaeus and was also the first Bishop of Jerusalem. His overall message is this: **“Be doers of the word and not hearers only.”** Saint James says put your faith into action because **“faith without works is dead (2:26).”**

To put it another way, if all we do is believe, if we fail to live a life of charity, we will not be saved. To make this point more forcefully, in another place, Saint James says, **“even the demons believe (2:18)”** but they are not in heaven. So faith without action is useless.

Think about it this way. We all know people who are skilled in something or who know a lot about something, but don't have any interest in that thing. At first glance, this might seem strange, but it's really not all that hard to understand.

For example, some people don't like their jobs. They know all they need to know about what they do, but they have no interest in what they do. If they could move on they would in an instant.

There are guys who used to go deer hunting but aren't interested any more. There are people who can play the piano, but who never touch it. There are people who used to play some sport but no longer find it fun.

I once met a lady who was born and raised in Germany. She was a wonderful Catholic woman. She came from the Benzinger family, and they were publishers of Catholic books in countries all around the world. In addition to German which was her first and best language, this woman also spoke several other languages fluently. She lived through World War II, and after the war ended, she used much of her fortune to help Pope Pius XII aid the many war refugees in Europe who had been left homeless and starving.

When she was done with her refugee work, she and her sister moved to America. She never went back to her homeland nor did she ever again speak her native language. Her reason was that she was so disgusted with what the Nazis had done to her country, and what the people there had allowed to happen, that she no longer wanted anything to do with them, even to the point of speaking her native language. She is another example of someone who knew a great deal about a subject but was not interested in it.

Now there are also people who behave that way with God. They may know all about what the Church teaches, but they just aren't interested. These people are not atheists. They really and truly believe in God, but they just aren't interested.

I once met a guy who never prayed or went to Mass, but he wasn't an atheist. In fact I asked him if he believed in God, and he said “yes.” Then he said, “look at all the stuff around us, someone had to make it.” However, this man just wasn't interested in having a relationship with God.

I knew another guy who had been a pilot for Northwest airlines. He was a very bright. He was raised Catholic but never practiced nor prayed. In fact, he was probably the most selfish person I ever met. As an example, he never married, and his reason was that he didn't want to be bothered with the needs of anyone. He spent all his money on himself.

Still he knew his faith. One time, he was having dinner with his sister-in-law (who was a convert to the faith), and the subject of Purgatory came up. She had some questions about it, and so, he proceeded to give her an excellent explanation of what it is we believe. In fact, his explanation was better than what 95% of the people who live their faith could have provided. This man knew what we believe. He hadn't lost his faith. He just wasn't interested.

So my point is this. We may know a lot about something, but that doesn't mean we have an interest in it. We may know a lot about something, but that may not move us to action, and that is exactly the point Saint James is making in his letter. We may know about our faith, but if we don't put our faith into practice, our knowledge is not going to get us anywhere.

That said, let's look a bit closer at what Saint James said. He says first that **"every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."** He is referring here to God the Father. He then says the **"[Father has] willed to give us birth by the word of truth."**

From the context, it's clear that Saint James is talking about our spiritual birth and not our physical one. Saint James says that we are begotten by the word of truth. In other words, we have come alive spiritually through the Father's gift. It is He who has given us the truth, and what sort of truth did He give?

The truth about God and about us. The truth about who we are and about how we need redemption. The truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and about how He came to save us. The truth about our Lord's suffering and death on the cross. And the truth about the Church and the Sacraments and about how we can share in the very life of God through baptism and the Eucharist.

So here is the question for us today: What will we do with this information? What will we do with these truths? Saint James gives us the answer. He says, **"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls."** He says, **"Be doers of the word and not hearers only."**

So, we should be grateful and humble for the great gift of the word we have received. We might also meditate on why God has chosen us for this gift of faith because He has not given this gift to everyone. The only answer is because of His great love for us. His love is far beyond what is reasonable from a human standpoint and also far beyond what we could ever imagine or understand.

So, what should be our response? To put our faith in action. Saint James says we should be **"doers of the word and not hearers only."** To know our faith is one thing. To live it is quite another. The man I mentioned earlier knew his faith quite well, but he did not live it.

Saint James goes on to say that religion which is **“pure and undefiled before God”** is a religion that cares for the widows and orphans, the weak and the helpless. It means caring for those in need. It means showing love and concern for those who are elderly who can no longer do what they could when they were young.

It means visiting the sick. It means reaching out to those who are hurting. It means feeding the hungry. It means working to defend children in the womb. It means sharing our faith with those who do not know God and inviting them to join us. It means praying with and for people. It means encouraging those who are weak in faith. It also means warning sinners to amend their lives so that they do not lose their souls.

Saint James also said that having a religion which is **“pure and undefiled before God”** means **“keeping oneself unstained by the world.”** In other words he is saying don't go digging in garbage.

You know how dogs sometimes tip over garbage cans and start digging through everything. Sometimes they even roll around in garbage or some other stinky, gross thing. Saint James is saying to us don't do that.

There's a lot of garbage in the world today. There are a lot of stinky, gross things, and we all know about these things. But unlike dogs, we don't have to roll in them. We don't have to go rooting through the garbage.

Just because you see some something on your computer or someone at work or school is passing around garbage on their phone doesn't mean you have to look at it. You don't have to stay around when crude conversations come up. You don't have to do unnecessary work on Sunday. You don't have to dress immodestly. You don't have to be materialists. You don't have to be rude. You don't have to do drugs. You don't have to tip over the virtual garbage can and get the smell all over yourself. That's what Saint James meant when he advised us to **“keep ourselves unstained by the world.”**

So let us follow his advice. Let us be thankful for our faith. Let us be thankful for the word of truth which we have received from God our Father.

Let us **“keep ourselves unstained by the world.”** Let us live a religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father. Let us be not be hearers of the word, but doers.

Finally, let us show our gratitude to God by loving others, and in particular by sharing our faith with them in both word and action. Amen.