

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Actions Speak Louder than Words”

Fr. Frank Schuster

“A minister was walking down the street when he came upon a group of about a dozen boys, all of them between 10 and 12 years of age. The group had surrounded a dog. Concerned lest the boys were hurting the dog, he went over and asked “What are you doing with that dog?” One of the boys replied, “This dog is just an old neighborhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we’ve decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog.” Of course, the reverend was taken aback. “You boys shouldn’t be having a contest telling lies!” he exclaimed. He then launched into a ten minute sermon against lying, beginning, “Don’t you boys know it’s a sin to lie,” and ending with, “Why, when I was your age, I never told a lie.” There was dead silence for about a minute. Just as the reverend was beginning to think he’d gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, “All right, give him the dog.” –Anonymous

I like this joke. I think we all find ourselves guilty at times of stretching the truth, sometimes innocently at first, but over time this can begin to affect our relationships. For instance, we have all known someone at some point who has a habit of saying one thing but doing another. I think that can be a frustrating experience over time. There comes a point where no one is interested in what that person says anymore because, “action speak louder than words”, right? But then again, how often do we judge others the same way we judge ourselves? Like the ancient bard Aesop commented once, “the injury we do and the one we suffer are not weighed in the same scales.” Isn’t that the truth? “The injury we do and the one we suffer are not weighed in the same scales.”

The ancients knew this very well. There is an ancient saying that I have shared with you before, “*Agere sequitur esse*”, from action follows being. This is a St. Thomas Aquinas way of saying, our actions reflect who we are. You can tell what a tree is by its fruit. My friends, our decisions, the words we use, and our actions tell others who we truly are, what our values are, what our character consists of, etc. Nothing else but our words and actions tell others who we are.

“*Agere sequitur esse*”. What we do reflects who we are. We see this clearly in the readings today. Ezekiel tells us in the first reading, following Deuteronomy, that there is a path of life and a path of death. He tells us that it is the choices we make that determine the road we travel. So, the invitation is, choose well. Actions speak louder than words. St. Paul tells us in Philippians that Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, so what happens? He says Jesus did something. He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave to save us from bondage. To liberate us, Jesus showed his love to the point

of death, even death on a cross. Jesus' actions spoke louder than his words. Jesus asks us in the Gospel reading, which of the two sons followed their father's instruction? What was the answer? Actions speak louder than words.

My friends, we all have a picture in our minds of who we are. Don't we? We all have a picture in our head of who we are. Now, the powerful question we can ask ourselves in the spirit life is, do our actions follow who we think we are? Do our actions follow who we think we are? This is a powerful question to ask in the spirit life. This makes for a good examination of conscience. And how our world is full of temptation and reckless behavior! Like U2's front man Bono says in one of their songs about American culture, he sings, in New York, freedom looks like too many choices. I have found that to be true from time to time. There comes a time in life when we must say "no" to certain people or things and "yes" to other people or things in order to maintain the dignity we expect of ourselves and the self-worth God calls us to.

So what does this mean as parishioners of Saint Teresa of Calcutta parish? If we are baptized, we can consider that it is one thing to remember our baptismal vows, it is another thing to live our baptismal vows. If you are married, it is one thing to remember your wedding vows and it is another thing to live your wedding vows. For all of us, it is one thing to say we care about the poor and defenseless, the foreigner, the unborn to the elderly and every stage of life in between and it is another thing to be truly caring for the poor and defenseless through our actions. Here in the parish, it is one thing to say we are involved as parishioners and another thing to be actively involved through our stewardship of time, talent and treasure. The Gospel reading challenges us to make our "yesses" mean yes and our "noes" mean no.

You see, we all have an image in our head of who we are. In all facets of life, it is good to consider whether our actions speak to who we think we are. Why is this so important? Faith, to be faith, must look like something. *Agere sequitur esse*. Our actions speak to who we are. This is why St. Paul also encourages us in Philippians, "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves." That is perhaps the best advice for anyone who wants to be happy in this life. "Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves." And so, in conclusion, the summary of today's Gospel reading could perhaps be that lovely quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi whose feast day is next week, say it with me if you remember it, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."