

11th Wednesday of Ordinary Time “The Importance of Authenticity”
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We are in chapter six of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is in full swing now. Jesus is the new Moses giving us the spirit of the law rather than just the letter. In today’s selection, we are getting a deeper insight into what perhaps irritates Jesus the most about those who claim to be “religious”. The common theme here is, when we worship God “Do not be like the hypocrites”. Now, everyone knows what the definition of a hypocrite is in today’s common parlance. However, a deeper insight can come from what Jesus was actually referring to when he used this term.

You see, a hypocrite in Jesus’ day was an actor. Jesus was probably referring to the street performers entertaining the people in the marketplaces. They would have masks so to become different characters so to perform skits, plays, and such. When Jesus uses this term to describe the religious leaders of his day, he is employing humor. He is essentially calling the religious elite of his day “clowns”.

What Jesus wants from those who call themselves disciples is authenticity. And, I think a way of going about that is by simply reflecting on how we present ourselves to others and compare that with who we really know ourselves to be inside. If they are one and the same, we are being perfectly authentic. If there is a radical disconnect between how I am presenting myself versus who I know myself to really be, that would mean I am just a pretender, an actor, a hypocrite.

And a really good litmus test of all this could be to simply reflect, what does my behavior look like when no one is around to see me? Is it consistent with who I present myself as being to others or is it something completely different? What does my mind dwell on in the private corners of the mind which no one else has access to? Is it consistent with the identity I present myself to others or is it something completely and entirely different?

You see, Jesus is warning us against developing multiple personality disorder in our spiritual lives. How we present ourselves publically as Christians should be the same as who we know ourselves to be inside. We are not always successful at that because we are all sinners and we fall short, sometimes spectacularly. The difference between someone who is working at authenticity and another who has become a hypocrite is that disciples who are still working on it haven’t given up. As soon as we give up the fight of conforming our inner life to how we present ourselves, that is when we lose the battle and become hypocrites. This is why prayer throughout the day is important, especially when no one is around to see us, so to keep ourselves connected to our Lord in all of our thoughts and activities. This is why performing an examination of conscience at the end of each day is also good for us, reflecting on the things we got right during the day versus the things we didn’t get right, and asking for God’s grace to make good on our mistakes.

My friends, as the Sermon on the Mount continues in the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus gives us an important insight on to how we can all improve when it comes to loving God and our neighbor. And, as a bonus, I believe Jesus also gives us a profound insight on how we can better love ourselves as well. The journey begins with authenticity.