

Homily—24th Sunday OT; B-cycle

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm and eat well, but if you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So, also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” Put your money where your mouth is.

That’s basically what Saint James is telling us today.

Do unto others, turn the other cheek, blessed are the poor, the meek, the lowly.

These are more than just things we say. These are precepts to live by.

And the Lord expects us to demonstrate our faith by our actions.

In our gospel today, Jesus puts a pivotal question to his apostles.

First, who do the people say that I am? They offer several answers, all of them wrong.

That’s the survey. That’s popular opinion. But you, who do YOU say that I am?

You whom I’ve opened my heart to, my dearest friends, what do YOU think?

Peter responds, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Peter doesn’t understand the answer, as is clear in the next verse.

He doesn’t understand the Messiah is going to redeem creation through his blood.

But at least he’s on the right track.

Now of course we have to answer that question for ourselves.

Who do we say that he is? Because if we believe as Peter did, we have no excuse not to act on our faith as James is telling us.

Popular opinion has many theories as to who Jesus is, was, and what he expects.

Some people believe that Jesus was some kind of magician, or mystic healer.

Some say he was an alien from space. (I’m NOT making that up, watch the History channel.) Some think he was a radical philosopher.

Some think he was a political opportunist, a fraud, a social revolutionary.

So how do we know whose opinion is right? The Church.

Jesus Christ founded a church built on the apostles.

If Jesus Christ did NOT found a church, what on earth DID he found then?

And so we come to the pivotal question again, but this time it’s “what do people say the

Church is?" Opinions vary.

The Church is a political entity, the Church is a purely human institution, the Church is a money making organization. That's popular opinion.

Just as with Jesus, they're all wrong. The Church is not a political entity but is drawn into politics when politics crosses into areas of morality, our forte.

The Church IS a money making organization, true enough. That's what we do.

We raise money. But that's only half the story. What do we raise that money for?

The Catholic Church is THE largest charity organization on earth.

No one takes care of the poor and needy more than us.

We are following St. James mandate.

We have whole missionary orders dedicated to taking care of the sick and poor.

The Little Sisters of the Poor, right here across town is one of them.

You may have seen on the news this past week Pope Francis encouraging European Catholic families to take in refugees, fleeing violence in Syria, and, as always, leading by example, Pope Francis is also taking refugee families in as guests of the Vatican.

We take care of the poor around the world, around our diocese through the Catholic Charity Drive, and in our city through the efforts of Saint Vincent DePaul.

But is the Church a purely human institution? There's the crux the matter.

Because if the Church is a purely human institution there's no reason to obey the Church. 'Yeah I'll obey on the stuff I agree with, and I'm going to disobey or ignore what I don't agree with.' Many Catholics have this attitude, and it's a dangerous attitude.

Because what does that attitude say? I believe the Church is a purely human institution.

Yeah, Jesus probably said some of that stuff in the bible, but the Church changed it over the centuries to serve its own needs.

The Church took advantage of superstitious, uneducated, people and brainwashed them into doing whatever it says.

That's rather insulting to the great intellects that converted to the faith over the centuries by honest philosophical growth, coming to the conclusion that Christianity was not only plausible, but logical.

That's why we don't teach that the Church is a purely human institution.

We ALSO don't teach that the Church is a purely Divine institution, meaning that the Pope is magically plugged into God when he wears his miter, or sits in the chair of Peter, and every decision he makes is coming straight from heaven.

What we teach is that the Church is a human institution, AND a Divine institution.

We teach that the Church is led by the Holy Spirit to protect it from error in areas of faith and morals. That is what we teach. That is what we believe as a Church.

Now it's up to each of us to ask ourselves, is that what I believe personally?

In fact, if you believe what the Church believes, it's not really even a separate question.

When Jesus asks us, "who do you say that I am," he is simultaneously asking, "what do you believe the Church is," because in the gospels, the Church and Christ are one. Christ IS the Church! There's no way to get around that in scripture, especially in the gospels of Matthew and John.

The theme of Matthew's gospel is the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom is Christ, and the Church is Christ. And John's gospel is all about the sacraments.

EVERYTHING in John's gospel is sacramental.

And so Jesus asks us all, "but you, who do you say that I am? You, my dearest ones.

You who have shared intimacy with me through the sacraments, who do you say that I am? Forget public opinion. Forget the surveys. That's where faith comes in.

And if we do embrace that Christ is the Church and the Church is Christ, and the Church has spent the past two millennium preserving everything that Jesus did and taught, what is our excuse for not putting that faith into action? And that action is mercy.

Pope Francis has made mercy the theme of his Pontificate.

That's what James is telling us in that passage I quoted.

If we believe Jesus is who he said he is; if we believe that Christ is the Church and the Church is Christ, we have to put our faith into tangible action and to do it now.

Think about it, if all this stuff in scripture and Church teaching is true, the clock is ticking. We don't have time to waste. We have to get busy.

Brothers and sisters look for opportunities to practice mercy.

Diligently be on watch for occasions to be charitable, to be patient, to be kind.

This kind of living faith will not only save our own souls, but will inspire others to come
back to Church and change their lives as well.

May God make it so.