

# Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of September, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 2, 2018

Read:

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Ps 15:2-5

James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23



**Reflect:**

In the Gospel reading this Sunday, Jesus chastises the Pharisees for honoring God only with their lips while their hearts were far from him; love was missing from their analysis of whether or not Jesus and his disciples had sinned when they disobeyed a Jewish rule about cleanliness.

The rule was more important to them than the person. They had the self-righteous attitude of: "I know better than you, and I am better than you, proven by the fact that I obey the laws that you're breaking."

Obedience, when motivated by a self-righteous adherence to rules, is hypocrisy. It uses the law as an opportunity to feel superior to others. A modern example might be when someone tells a priest that he is sinning because he isn't adhering exactly to the norms for Mass as prescribed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. If he or she doesn't stop to understand why the priest believes the adaptations are allowable and pastoral, who really is the sinner?

When this happens, "in vain do they worship me," Jesus says. The meaning of the Mass has been lost.

There is a hierarchy of rules and laws. Some rules change with the needs of the times. Of greatest importance are the Commandments of God, the Moral Laws, which never change. All of them are supposed to help us on our journey to heaven.

It is right to speak up when we witness disobedience, and we *should* do it, but only because we

care about the sinner's spiritual growth and only when we can handle it without ignoring or overlooking the reasons behind the disobedience. We are most successful in guiding others into greater holiness when we take the time to first understand the roots of their disobedience and then address those concerns with love.

This is how we become, as the second reading says, "doers of the word and not hearers only", because, as James adds, "pure" religion is caring for others. The Pharisees in the Gospel story didn't care about the hunger of the disciples.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

† How do you know when you're being hypocritical in your faith?

† How do you handle the discovery that you've done something uncaring?

**Questions for Faith Sharing:**

† Give an example of a Moral Law and an example of a regulation that was instituted by the Church to address a specific need for a specific time. How do they differ in importance?

† Name one of the 10 Commandments or a teaching of the Church and explain how it became an opportunity for you to become more like Christ.

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 16, 2018

Read:

Isaiah 50:5-9a  
Ps 116:1-6, 8-9  
James 2:14-18  
Mark 8:27-35



**Reflect:**

This Sunday's second reading defines the doctrine of faith and works.

Works without faith, no matter how good the works are, don't get us into heaven. Some of us try to earn our way into God's heart by serving in church activities, saying all the "right" prayers, and so on. This idea comes from our childhood when we learned: "If I'm good enough, Mom and Dad will reward me" and "If I do well in school, the teacher will give me a gold star" or smiley face or whatever it is they paste on homework today.

The problem is, we can never be good enough for heaven. This is why Jesus came to earth and took our sins to the cross.

Faith without works isn't going to get us into heaven, either. Here's why:

Faith in Jesus starts with believing that, in his love for us, he died for us and rose again so that we'll have eternal life. This is what opens the door to heaven. However, to walk through that door, we have to follow Jesus. This requires doing more than believing in his death and resurrection; we also believe in his life -- *how* he lived his life. Following Jesus affects our lifestyles and our day-to-day behavior. How Christ-like is it?

The proof that we truly do have faith is evidenced in the good works that we do. Faith in Jesus means we love him so much that we love all those whom he loves, which is EVERYone regardless of whether they deserve it or not.

And faith in Jesus means we trust him so much that we do whatever he tells us -- imitating him in all of our activities, adopting his attitudes, and responding to his calling to serve as priests, religious, and lay ministers, even when it seems risky or illogical.

Thus, when Jesus says to us, "Who do you say that I am?" we answer that he is our Savior who takes us to heaven, and he is our Lord who teaches us how to live, and he is our Lover who empowers us to love others even when it becomes a cross to bear.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

† Is Jesus Christ truly your Lord and Savior? Do you believe that he suffered and died on your behalf so that you could reach heaven?

† Are you doing good works because you adore him so much that you want to go where he goes and do what he does and serve as his hands and feet and voice wherever he leads you?

**Questions for Faith Sharing:**

† How does your life convey to others that Jesus is your Lord and Savior? If you wore no Christian jewelry and spoke no words, how would you tell others who Jesus is?

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 30, 2018

Read:

Numbers 11:25-29

Ps 19:8, 10, 12-14

James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48



### Reflect:

Jesus says in this Sunday's Gospel reading that whoever is not against us is for us. The reality of this often takes us by surprise in unexpected partners.

On the one hand, it can seem like someone is against us when really they are not. For example, when someone speaks a truth that we don't want to hear, that person seems to be our enemy while in fact they are God's chosen prophet.

At other times, people side with us but only for their own agenda; they're not interested in assisting the purposes that God has for our lives.

And sometimes we encounter people who are doing the Lord's work but not in the way that we expect them to, and so we assume that they are not doing what God wants them to do. Have you ever asked someone to pray for a certain intention and he/she prayed the opposite of what you intended?

Years ago, when my husband's company was laying off most of its employees, I asked a friend to pray for him so that he could find a new job, but she prayed instead for the company so that he wouldn't have to leave it. My expectations were for him to find a healthier company in which to work. I didn't like her prayer, but in the end, I realized that she was the only friend who had prayed exactly what the Lord had wanted!

To figure out whether someone is truly against us or is, in fact, God's instrument for us, we have to separate ourselves from the heat and frustrations of

the experience and sit quietly with Jesus. After we vent to him our fears and anger and then forgive those who seem to be against us, we will be open to hearing a more divine assessment of the situation.

Even when someone truly is acting against us, when we sit quietly in prayer, seeking a word of knowledge or wisdom from the Holy Spirit, we can discover that God is for us and that's what matters most. He gives us encouragement and strength to endure any troubles.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who is telling you something that you don't like hearing? Is it possible that the Lord is speaking through this person?

† Whom have you trusted that turned out to be a false friend or a bad influence which harmed your faith?

† Who has been an unexpected instrument of the Lord on your spiritual journey?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When have you been startled to discover that someone who didn't seem to be "of the Lord" was really doing the Lord's work? What did the Lord accomplish through this unexpected source?

† What did you learn from it?

### Comments/Prayer Requests: