

“Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls. Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.” These are the powerful words from the Second Reading today from the Letter of St. James the Just, a relative of Christ and the first bishop of the Church in Jerusalem who was stoned to death and martyred around 62 A.D. under the high priest Ananus II.

Before we delve deeper into the meaning of St. James’ words, we have to ask: who or what is the “word” that St. James is referring to? Well the “Word” can be understood in two ways. First and foremost, the “Word” is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, Who is the *Word* of the Father. Our Lord Jesus *is* the Word made Flesh. So the Word, properly understood, is not a thing, but a Person and that Person is our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom *our entire Catholic faith* is rooted.

So when St. James writes, “Humbly welcome the word” and “Be doers of the word and not hearers only...” he is saying humbly welcome *Christ* into your life and *allow Christ to live and to love through you*. In other words, with the help of grace, *truly be Jesus in your life*

*through your actions!* We're called to live as *Christ lives* and to love as He loves, because to be a disciple of Jesus means to conform our entire life *to Him and to the teachings of His Catholic Church*. As Christians, we're called to make Christ present in the world through every aspect of our life: our thoughts, words, *and* actions.

Since our entire Catholic faith is rooted in Christ, then one could say that Christ *is* our Catholic faith. Our Lord Jesus is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty incarnate and so all of the teachings of the Catholic Church point *toward* Him and flow *from* Him because He is Love in the flesh! Indeed, our Lord Jesus gave us our faith as a gift to help us remain in Him and to imitate Him so that we could love as *He loves*.

And so the second way we can understand and interpret the “word” in the context of St. James’ letter is that the “word” *is* our Catholic faith. Therefore when St. James exhorts us saying, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves” he’s saying, *live your Catholic faith! Practice what you preach! Let your actions support your words! Let your faith explain and define every aspect of your life!*

This powerful exhortation of St. James complements our Savior's words in the Gospel today when He responds to the scribes and Pharisees who are so critical and unmerciful. Our Lord says to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts. You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition.*"

Brothers and sisters, in light of Jesus' words here, we have to honestly ask ourselves: "Where is my heart? Do I merely honor God with my lips but reject Him with my heart and in my actions? Do I cling to my own human traditions and attitudes while disregarding God's commandments and the fundamental teachings of His Church? Do I selfishly try to create my own religion centered on *me, my* ideological and political agenda, and *my* lifestyle and sinfulness?"

Do I practice Cafeteria Catholicism, where I selfishly pick and choose which basic teachings of Christ and His Church I actually want to accept and live by? "Ugh that teaching about the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death, forget that one! Those

teachings about loving my enemies, forgiving others, and helping the poor, nope, not for me! That teaching about the dignity of marriage as the union of one man and one woman, nope Christ and His Church are need to get with the times! That teaching against contraception and having to be open to the gift of children within marriage, get outta here Father! Go back to the Stone Age!”

Brothers and sisters, cafeteria Catholicism has been one of the most destructive and divisive *human traditions* within the Church in the last couple decades. Such a self-centered ideology has no basis in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who wants us to receive everything *from* Him and to give *everything* to Him in our life. Just as a husband desires his wife in a total manner in love and fidelity and vice-versa, so also Christ desires us in a total manner in love and fidelity.

Other human traditions that we might be tempted to live by rather than our Catholic faith are: “do whatever makes you feel good! Do whatever makes you happy, even if it’s sinful, selfish, offensive to God, or harmful to yourself or others.” We love distorting Jesus’ words to fit our agenda! Like we love distorting Jesus’ command to not judge by

turning it into some divine endorsement of moral relativism: “well there’s no such thing as objective truth and you have your truth and I have my truth. Just believe and do whatever you want and you’ll go to Heaven anyway.” #ThingsJesusNeverSaid. Yet these are the popular and false human traditions that we can cling to over and above our Catholic faith, which comes to us from Christ and the universal Church *He* founded upon the 12 Apostles.

If we call ourselves Catholic, it only stands to reason then that we should actually *be Catholic*, in our *whole* life, in our thoughts, words, *and* actions, and in how we live privately *and* publicly. Our Catholic faith should define and explain us. Being a Catholic who chooses *not* to live the faith in word and deed is like being a vegetarian who eats meat—it simply doesn’t make sense. We’re not just Catholic when we come to mass for one hour on Saturday or Sunday. This is what the Lord is getting at in today’s Liturgy of the Word. Brothers and sisters, how would we like it if someone honored us with their lips but didn’t love us in their hearts and in their actions?

We're called to truly love the Lord and our neighbor through our thoughts, words, *and* actions. *Words must be supported by deeds!* For love to be real, it must be expressed in actions! Every time we love God and our neighbor through our thoughts, words, and actions, we are truly worshipping God! Brothers and sisters, we could come to mass every day of our life, but if we don't love God and our neighbor in our hearts and actions, then what are we doing? If we come to mass everyday but then we don't live our faith by how we love God and others privately and publicly in our actions, then what are we doing?!

Brothers and sisters, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is meant to be a launching pad for missionary discipleship—once we leave this church, we are sent forth by the Lord to joyfully and courageously live our Catholic faith by making Christ present in the world through our thoughts, words, and actions! In fact, the word “mass” comes from the Latin *missa*, which means, “to be sent”! So the dismissal that the priest or deacon says at the end of mass is not a simple goodbye, but rather a *sending forth on mission* to be living witnesses to Christ and His

Church in the world by loving the Lord and our neighbor with every fiber of our being, especially in our actions!

Brothers and sisters, if our prayer and worship at Mass does not translate into practical love of God and others through action, then we are not receiving all that Christ wants to give us and do *through* us. We are not fulfilling our vocation as missionary disciples of Christ. As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus today in the Most Holy Eucharist, may we not just honor him with our lips but truly love Him with our hearts and in our actions. And once the Lord sends us forth from this mass and every mass, may we live our Catholic faith in its fullness by loving God and our neighbor, especially in our actions, for then we will truly be *doers* of the Word, and not hearers only.