

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
TWENTYSECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)
2nd SEPTEMBER 2012

Deut 4. 1-2, 6-8; Psalm 14.2-5; James 1. 17-18, 21-22, 27; Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23

“Just do it”.

Nike’s advert is known throughout the world and St James could have created this motto for them. He tells us to be doers, not just listeners. It could also be our motto. And whilst I’m not sure of the integrity of the advertising world, this slogan can bring to mind two concepts for us.

So I’d like to take two of the themes that run through today’s readings – action and integrity. Put another way:” Just do it, but do it with integrity”. Today’s readings put a question right in our faces, do we just give God lip service, or do we give him heart service?

Moses urges Israel to take notice of God’s Laws and he warns them not to add anything or subtract anything. The result if they follow God’s Law is that they – like you and I – will have life. Indeed, Israel loved God’s Law; no other nation had such a gift. They recognised that the commandments were a gift. They were not fences which kept them trapped, rather they signposted the way to true freedom – freedom which is good for community but also for inner peace and joy.

However, over time they both added and subtracted to God’s Law. Their original intentions may have been good, but eventually these extra rules gained the same importance as God’s Law itself. So, the focus went wrong and the Scribes and Pharisees became judgemental of anyone who didn’t keep the rules as they did. Many of them were truly devout, but their hearts were no longer focused on God but on rules and regulations.

But let’s be careful. It’s easy to criticise the Pharisees, but do we do the same? Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to complete it.

I think we subtract from God’s law in two ways.

Firstly- Do we pick and choose which commandments we want to follow? God calls us not to be selective listeners. Some of us may perhaps do good charity work but then exempt ourselves from keeping Sunday holy. Others of us may be faithful in prayer but neglect people in need – remember we have just had a week when we were asked to support the Lantern. If God tells us something and we don’t believe it nor act on it, we are behaving like the Pharisees did. We risk giving lip service whilst keeping our hearts to ourselves.

The second way we may subtract from God’s Law is by being minimalist.

We've just had the Olympic Games and the Paralympics are starting. I wonder how many of those athletes were happy simply if they did just enough to get selected. It's more likely they strove to do their utmost, get personal best scores or medals. Compare this effort to how we approach God.

Do we come to Mass because it's a rule (good starting point) but want to know how late we can arrive or early we can leave for it still to "count"? Do we avoid serious sin but never **strive** to become holy? Are we happy with doing just enough, or do we want the fullness of the relationship God is calling us to?

I say this because the consequences of being half hearted are so sad. We may have an OK, even a good life, but we will never experience the joy that God wants to give us in this world if we only give him lip service and not our hearts. (St Ambrose says that our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in God).

Perhaps we can examine our consciences and see if we treasure God's Law, if we truly love God? If we ourselves have become a bit like the Pharisees, and our appearance has taken too much importance, we can ask God to focus our hearts back onto him.

Throughout Mark's Gospel there is a lot of conflict between the leaders and Jesus. Today Jesus bluntly says they have put aside God's commandment to cling to human traditions. And then he hammers home the point he wants to make – integrity.

It's not what is outside us that makes us unclean and causes problems; it's what is in us. As a doctor I advise people to eat healthily and take exercise. Then by their activity I can see they have a healthy body. Similarly, the condition of our heart is seen from how we behave. Our actions, how we treat each other show the truth about our hearts.

We inevitably have sadness at leaving St Augustine's church. But, and it's an important but, where is our heart? Are we stuck with the tradition of a building and allowing this to occupy our focus, or will we keep our hearts on God so that we can build our community where God is now asking us? Will we "do it", or as in last week's Gospel will we be like the followers who gave up?

We live in a world where morals are changing farther and farther away from God's. We have a choice. We can adopt these as our basis and we will find ourselves sooner or later trapped by them; or we can follow God's law of love, and have life and freedom. As I alluded to earlier, freedom doesn't mean I can do anything, but it does mean I shall have joy and inner peace. (Celebrate)

"Just do it". James could have worked for Nike! God's word is in us, planted in our hearts and James warns us we must "do it" or we are deceiving ourselves that we are following God, for in fact we are simply following a rule.

Here's a test for us all. A doer of the word is someone who hears the readings and tries to apply them to their own life. Are we doers, or idle listeners that James warns against?

We may ask ourselves whether, in some small way, anything in last week's readings changed our lives.

If we can't even remember anything about the readings God wants us to change that. Jesus tells us that his true brothers and sisters are those who hear God's word and act on it. That's a challenge for us. Let's ask him to help us.

So, next time we see a Nike advert or insignia, don't just see what the company hoped, look deeper. Let it focus our mind on our integrity as a Christian, to consider where our heart is; let it focus us to strive to be more like Jesus, and help us to "just do it", and do it with integrity. God bless us all.

From 'Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer' by C.S.Lewis

"I am often, I believe, praying for others when I should be doing things for them. It's so much easier praying for a bore than to go and see them"

Rev Jonathan de Kretser