

3.2.2025 Quinquagesima (1 Corinthians 13; Luke 18:31-43)

Desmond Tutu, an Anglican bishop and theologian who helped lead the quest to end apartheid in South Africa, was once asked by the BBC to identify the defining moment of his life. He answered the question by recalling a day when he was nine years old, a day when he and his mother were walking down the street and a tall white man dressed in a black suit was coming toward them. In the days of apartheid, when a black person and white person met on a sidewalk, the black person was expected to step off the path and allow the white person to pass while nodding their head as a gesture of respect. However, on this day, before the young Desmond Tutu and his mother could step off the sidewalk, the white man stepped aside. As they passed, he tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to her. The white man was Fr. Trevor Huddleston, an Anglican priest who was bitterly opposed to apartheid. When Desmond's mother told him that this man had stepped off the sidewalk because he was a "man of God," Desmond Tutu found his calling. He said to the BBC, "When she told me that he was an Anglican priest, I decided then and there that I wanted to be an Anglican priest too. And what is more, I wanted to be a man of God."

The defining moment of Desmond Tutu's life is an example of all that is possible when Christians simply practice what they preach. At nine years old, the trajectory of his life was set on a particular course not only because of what an Anglican priest believed, but because of the way he practiced that belief. Picture Fr. Huddleston walking toward a young Desmond Tutu and his mother that day. This priest was a man who would've prayed, and therefore believed, as we do, that God, "hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the whole earth..." (For Missions), that He gives us "grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice..." (For the Unity of God's People), but what Fr. Huddleston believed, and what we believe, must be accompanied by action, or what purpose does our faith serve?

Orthodoxy (the correct doctrines of our faith), and orthopraxy, (the correct practice of our faith), are two necessary parts of one whole Christian life. What we believe and what we practice are vitally connected in a relationship of cause and effect. In the example we're considering, Fr. Huddleston

believed that God made people of every nation, tribe, and tongue in His image and likeness, and therefore racial segregation and discrimination are evil. This Christian belief was the cause that led to the effect, the act of stepping off the sidewalk and tipping his hat in a gesture of respect to persons of a different race, an act that turned out to be the defining moment in the life of a boy who went on to become a “man of God” and an Anglican bishop who won the Nobel prize for his efforts in ending apartheid, and this is just one example of all that is possible when Christians simply practice what they preach.

St. James stated, “*Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...*” (James 2:17). For the Christian, faith is not mental assent to a list of facts. The Christian faith is not only a matter for the mind, but for the heart and soul that will be manifest in the way we live and love, and we recognize that truth in the passages from Scripture we read this morning. Our Epistle lesson is viewed by many as one of the most beautiful chapters in the Bible. Often called “the love chapter,” these words define Christian love, and for clarity, I’ll read a portion of this chapter from the ESV, which tells us that “*love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

In this definition of love we recognize not only correct doctrine, but the necessity of correct practice. Clearly, it’s not enough for the faithful Christian to believe that love is patient and kind, each of us must be patient and kind. What we believe in our mind about love must be expressed in our lives through heartfelt acts of love, and one way to test whether or not our actions are an expression of the biblical definition of love is to insert ourselves into this passage in the place of the word love, and then ask, are these statements true? For example, instead of “*love is patient and kind,*” can we say of ourselves, I am patient and kind; I do not envy or boast; I am not arrogant or rude. I do not insist on my own way; I am not irritable or resentful; I do not rejoice at wrongdoing, I rejoice in the truth...

This test quickly becomes difficult and convicting, but Holy Scripture tells us

to “*Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine*” (2 Corinthians 13:5), and as we’ve seen genuine faith is not merely mental assent to a list of Christian beliefs. Genuine faith is instead sincere belief accompanied by action. Consider the way our Gospel lesson illustrates that truth. The Gospel passage began with Jesus taking His twelve disciples aside from the crowd, telling them privately, “*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death...*” (Luke 18:31-33).

Picture the scene. Our Lord has taken these men aside, and is now telling them what is about to happen to Him. He will soon be mocked, insulted, spit on, flogged, and crucified. Jesus is marching toward His Passion and Death, and we know that since He is fully God, He sees every bloody detail of what will soon come to pass, and because He is fully man, He has the human ability and human experience to know and to understand just how excruciatingly painful His death will be. We can’t begin to comprehend the immeasurable weight of the thoughts that were pressing down upon Him, and yet, notice what takes place as the passage continues.

As they approached Jericho, “*a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood...*” (Luke 18:35-40).

Jesus stopped. With the weight of the sins of the world on His shoulders, at a moment when we would expect Him to be concerned with nothing but Himself, His own Passion and Death, the cries of one poor, blind beggar stop our Lord in His tracks. Why? Because what a person believes is not only a matter for the mind, but for the heart and soul that will be manifest in the way we live and love. Fr. Huddleston not only believed that racial segregation and discrimination are evil, he acted on that belief. He stepped off the sidewalk in an act of humility, respect, and equality toward persons of another race, and Jesus, on His way to the Cross, stopped to heal one poor blind beggar, not

only because of what He believes about love, but because He is love - in thought, in word, in deed.

By the grace of God, as we strive to “*imitate Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1), may our faith in Him not only be a matter for the mind, but for the heart and soul that will be seen in the way we live and love, and just like the defining moment of Desmond Tutu’s life, may those who we meet on the sidewalk, when they see our faith in action, decide then and there that they also want to become men and women of God.