

REFLECTION FOR FRIDAY OF FIRST WEEK OF LENT 2021

Ezek 18:21-28 Matt 5:20-26

In our culture, image is everything. Appearances are more important than the substance. But appearances can be deceptive.

Jesus said, 'If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.' That statement must have surprised his hearers. And it must have greatly angered the Scribes and Pharisees, who liked to think of themselves as truly virtuous people. Jesus declared that their virtue was superficial.

The main fault that Jesus found in the Scribes and Pharisees was that they lacked charity. Jesus said that his disciples would have to do better.

But you might think: virtue is virtue. Not so. There is shallow, inauthentic virtue. Virtue is shallow when the motive is not pure – an unworthy motive can spoil even the best deed. Virtue is shallow when it lacks personal conviction and is practiced merely out of convention or conformity or routine. Virtue is inauthentic when the person is not sincere.

There is deep, true, authentic virtue. It is the expression of what one is inside. It is a revelation of the heart.

Sin and virtue, badness and goodness, are essentially matters of the heart. Corruption of the heart is the worst kind of badness – it is to be bad at the core. Goodness of heart is the best kind of goodness.

Hence, we must not be content merely to look at the surface of our lives – at our words and deeds. We must have the courage to search our hearts. We need to look at what is going on inside us – at our thoughts, intentions, attitudes, and desires.

Piety is no substitute for good deeds.

When considering our sins, we have to consider the sins of the heart – resentments, jealousies, angers, hatreds, unforgiveness, etc. sins of the heart may be our worst sins, and the root cause of our external sins.

From the spiritual point of view, one of the worst things we can say about anyone is that he or she has a cold heart or a hard heart. To be cold-hearted is to be unable to show kindness, understanding, sympathy, mercy, forgiveness.

On the other, one of the best things we can say about anyone is that he is warm-hearted. This means you are capable of goodness, kindness, tenderness, compassion, mercy, love.

What we have to strive for is goodness of heart.

May God help us to keep our thoughts clean, our desires pure, our words true, and our deeds kind.

Fr Patrick