

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, October 1, 2023
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A

John Chambers tells the story of an underground Catholic who was brought before the judge in Communist China. There was a prosecutor for the State and a lawyer for the accused. The prosecutor began his case by saying, "The agents for the State have seen the accused kneeling and saying his prayers, before sleeping and upon waking. Our secret agents have seen him praying the rosary and receiving communion. They have also seen him making the sign of the cross before and after eating, and sometimes, he makes the novena on Wednesdays."

After saying this, the prosecutor rested his case. The lawyer for the defense rose and said, "Your honor, I do not dispute anything that the prosecutor has just said." The whole courtroom broke out in whispers. Then the defense lawyer continued, "But even though my client does all these things, he is still no different from other Chinese citizens who do not believe in God."

"My client's prayers and Bible reading have no effect on his outward conduct. He too is over-concerned with material things. He too has little concern for the poor. If he is insulted, he returns the insult. Your honor, my client is a Catholic in name and in words only. And for this reason, I ask that the case be dismissed for lack of evidence."

The whole courtroom was shocked by what the defense lawyer said, and it was moved into complete silence. After some moments, the judge spoke, "For lack of evidence that this person is a Catholic in fact and in act, I dismiss this case!"

In today's gospel reading Jesus tells the parable of two sons who say one thing and do another. Asked by the father to go and work in the vineyard the first son said no but later

reconsidered his decision and did the work. The second son, on the other hand, politely said yes to the father but did not follow this through and failed to do the work. The message of today's gospel parable is this: Obedience is in our action and not in our words.

What if you were the one put on trial for being a Catholic Christian? How will your trial go? Would there be enough *evidence* to prove that you are a true Christian, a genuine Catholic? Actually, all of us, in a sense, are on trial today.

The "final verdict" that each of us should pray for is: "The court finds you guilty, beyond reasonable doubt, of being a true follower of Jesus and a genuine Catholic." Shame on us if the court finds us "not guilty." Not guilty because we are Catholics in name and words only... we are no different from those who do not believe in God...we, too, are overly concerned with material things... we, too, have little concern for the poor and the needy...our Christian prayers, liturgical celebrations, and Bible-reading have no significant effect on our outward conduct... when we are offended, we retaliate; we do not forgive.

Let us pray then for the grace that will enable us to show the court that we are genuine Catholic Christians. May we be able to prove that we are true followers of Christ.

- + That we are living the gospel values in our everyday life.
- + That our absolute loyalty is to God and not to any political leader.
- + That we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
- + That we take care of the poor, the deprived and the oppressed.
- + That we are merciful and forgiving to those who sin against us.
- + That we practice good stewardship of time, talents and resources.

Indeed, actions speak louder than words. Promises can never take the place of performance. Fine words are never a substitute for fine deeds.

We are not disciples of Jesus, we are not Christian Catholics just because we have a Bible (and we read it from time to time), we go to Mass as often as possible, we attend recollections and retreats, we study catechism or theology or we pray the rosary.

As Jesus says: “***Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.***”

What we profess and practice should meet and match. There must be congruence between our words and our actions. We must strive to carry out our fine words into fine deeds. *Our “Yes, Lord!”* must be translated into concrete actions. The way we live our life must be a “Yes to God.”