

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, September 1, 2024
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle B

In today's gospel reading, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and scribes for their focus on external rituals while neglecting the deeper matters of the heart. The Pharisees were more concerned with appearances and traditions than with true righteousness. They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from him.

Authentic worship is not about the mere performance of religious rituals; it is about the transformation of our hearts. It is easy to fall into the habit of going through the motions – attending Mass, reciting prayers, and participating in the Sacraments—without allowing these sacred practices to penetrate our hearts and change us from within. Genuine worship calls for our hearts to be in harmony with God's will, ensuring that our outward actions mirror a deep, inner life of faith, love, and dedication to him. Remember: God values the love behind our actions more than the actions themselves.

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Venerable Fulton J. Sheen echoed this sentiment when he said: *“The greatest illusion in the world is the illusion of piety.* How easy it is to kneel before an altar and think you are worshiping God when your heart is far from him.”

There is a danger in becoming too focused on the externals of our faith. We might attend Mass every Sunday, recite all the prayers, and even serve in various ministries, but if our hearts are not in it, if we are not living out our faith in our daily lives, then our worship becomes empty. It becomes lip service, devoid of the true love and reverence that God desires from us. It is possible to be close to the altar and yet far from God. What is the use of outward observance if the heart is not right with him?

Let us make sure that our faith is lived out sincerely, from the heart, rather than being just a series of external actions. True worship is about connecting with God on a deep, personal level, allowing that connection to transform every aspect of our lives. St. Augustine once said, "True worship is a matter of the heart, and the heart must be rooted in love." "Our actions should be a natural outflow of the love we hold for God and others." In other words, to worship God, to give glory to God, it is not enough to perform religious duties. - Our hearts must be fully engaged, seeking to fulfill his will in all that we do.

Pope Francis puts it this way: "The essence of worship is not found in external forms, but in the heart's conversion to God." "A heart truly turned to God will naturally express itself in acts of love and service."

Jesus challenges us to examine the state of our hearts. Are we worshiping God in spirit and truth, or are we merely going through the motions? Authentic worship requires a heart that is humble, repentant, and fully devoted to God. It calls us to live out our faith in every aspect of our lives, allowing God's love to transform us from the inside out.

As we reflect on today's gospel message, let us ask ourselves: Are our hearts aligned with our worship? Do our external actions reflect an internal reality of love for God and neighbor?

Let us be true worshippers who honor God with our hearts and our lives. May our worship be authentic, rooted in a deep love for God, and may it lead us to live lives that truly reflect his grace and mercy.