

If one could summarize today's Liturgy of the Word, especially today's rich Gospel from Matthew, one could say that: ***God desires conversion and repentance, not "lip service."*** In the eyes of our Heavenly Father ***sincere repentance*** is ***infinitely better*** than dishonest lip service, which is ***totally contrary*** to the loving will of God.

And before I continue, let me just preface by saying that the ***only*** reason Jesus challenges His listeners in the Gospels and calls them out is ***precisely*** because He loves them and He wants to save them from sin and death. ***There is no other divine motive*** for Jesus' challenging words to us than love. In fact, the Lord basically tells us this in the Gospel of John 3:16 when He says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. ***For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.***"

So Jesus' tough words in the Gospels should never be misinterpreted as words of unjust condemnation, but rather words of loving challenge that are meant to redirect us toward holiness, freedom, true happiness, and the salvation God wants to give us.

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us the Parable of the Two Sons in which the second son is "guilty-as-charged" when it comes to paying cheap lip service to the Father. This second son basically *lies* to the Father, saying, "sure, I'll go into Your vineyard" and then he never goes—he never actually does the Father's will. The second son is a liar and so his behavior is characterized by deceit.

On the contrary, the first son *initially refuses* to go into the vineyard and tells the Father, "no, I won't go," but then later experiences a change of heart and decides to go. This is the son who *truly did the Father's will*—who is a perfect example of sincere repentance and conversion of heart and mind. It's *this sincere repentance*—this turning away from sin and evil and embracing virtue—that our loving Father eagerly desires for us with *every ounce of His divinity!* True repentance and conversion of heart and mind is rooted in humility, sorrow for one's sins, and a loving desire to change—a desire to sin no more.

Brothers and sisters, practically speaking, what does "lip service" to the Father look like? Well if we're honest with ourselves as sinners, then I think we can all admit that given *our own* sinfulness, we've all

paid dishonest lip service to the Father at one point or another in our lives. Such dishonest lip service to the Father, in which we shout “Yes” with our words and then “No” with our actions, is a constant temptation that we should always guard against.

Lip service to the Father might sound something like: “Yes, I’m Catholic, I go to mass every weekend, but I don’t really care about holiness and becoming a saint.” Or “Yep, I’m Catholic and I go to mass every week, but I refuse to change my sinful ways—I don’t want to stop committing my favorite sins—in fact, I don’t think they’re sins at all. Yes, I’m Catholic, I go to mass, *but I refuse* to form my conscience in accordance with the fundamental teachings of Christ and His Church.”

“Yes, I’m Catholic and I go to mass every week, but *I refuse to forgive that person* who hurt me. Yes, I’m Catholic, been through 12 years of Catholic education, I go to mass every week, but I *strongly reject* many of the fundamental doctrinal and moral teachings of Christ and His Church, especially those ‘horrible’ and ‘unpopular’ teachings on human sexuality—ugh forget those.”

“Yes, I’m Catholic, but I refuse to help the poor, the hungry, and those who are suffering. Yes, I’m Catholic, go to mass every week, was raised Catholic, but I support the legalized killing of innocent pre-born children through abortion-on-demand. Yep, I’m Catholic, go to mass all the time, but I support the government redefining marriage as something other than the union of man and one woman.”

Brothers and sisters, we could go on and on with countless other examples of empty lip service to the Father—of many who *proudly* claim to be Catholic, but are actively and selfishly living in a way that is *totally contrary* to the Catholic faith. And again, this is a trap that *all of us* can be tempted to fall into! Such dishonest lip service to the Father is symptomatic of what many would classify as “Cafeteria Catholicism,” this notion that based on my own selfishness, my own lifestyle, my own partisan political and ideological agenda, “I’m going to pick and choose which *fundamental* teachings of the Catholic faith I want to believe in and accept.” Nothing has inflicted more damage to the unity of the Church than “Cafeteria Catholicism.”

I mean, can you imagine a marriage like that? A “cafeteria marriage” where you can just pick and choose which fundamental duties and responsibilities of a marriage you want to believe in and accept? “Oh fidelity and honesty with my spouse? Forget that!” Would anyone approach a job like that? “Yes hire me for this job—but oh by the way, I refuse to do A, B, and C which are all an essential part of the job description.” Brothers and sisters, it doesn’t make sense.

The faithful and loving disciple is the one who says “Yes, Lord, I will do Your Will” and then manifests their “yes” through their actions and how they live. As Catholics, we’re called to be *authentic* and *faithful* disciples of Christ who *do the Lord’s will* and are consistent in word *and* deed. We’re called to live our Catholic faith with every fiber of our being in both public and private—we’re called to say what we mean and mean what we say and then support our words with action.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian eloquently said, “Christ does not want admirers, *but followers.*” Brothers and sisters, in a few moments, we’ll encounter our merciful Savior here in the Most Holy Eucharist. As we worship and

receive our Lord Jesus, let's plead with Him for the grace to always be faithful to Him in word *and* deed—to *always* faithfully and courageously *follow* Him so that we may truly be one of *His authentic* disciples.