**24th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle B**

September 12/13, 2015

Isaiah 50: 5-9a; James 2: 14-18; Mark 8: 27-36

Is your faith alive or dead? This is the central question that St. James asks in his letter which we read today. Is your faith alive or dead?

Faith that is alive is a faith that professes with the lips that Jesus is Lord and Savior and then confirms that profession by loving him and others from heart. It is a faith that acknowledges and knows Jesus through a personal encounter with him, and then doing good work with him by loving our neighbor.

To profess with our lips that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world, that he is both God and man, and that he died to redeem us and pay the debt of our sins and the sins of the world – to profess this with faith – that is pure grace and a gift from God. There is nothing we can do to earn such a grace, such a gift of faith and the forgiveness of our sins. It is God’s grace and his gift to us.

But to live out that faith by doing the right, by living a life of good works, that is a life lived from the heart; it is a series of choices that we must make if our faith is truly alive and not dead in sin.

The first gift, the gift of faith, we cannot earn, for it is God’s gift to us; the second gift, the gift of good works we give to God and our neighbor.

Many people will profess with their lips but not live with the heart. Why? Because they don’t want the Cross of Christ. Many want to be called Christian and saved without the requirements of discipleship. Many want the love of God, but do not want to love others. Many want a life of prosperity and good feeling, but not a life of sacrifice, a life of good works, the Cross.

God help the man who refuses to profess with his lips that Jesus is Lord, for such a man is lost. God forgive the man who refuses to live the faith with the heart of Christ by doing good work, for such a man is trapped in sin.

We must live with the heart of Christ. What is the heart of Christ? The heart of Christ is the Cross. The heart of Christ is a life lived in love, in doing good, in self-giving and sacrifice, a life lived from the Cross.

Think of Jesus. He professed with his lips all that the Father told him, and he did the good work that came from that profession even to the Cross, to Golgotha.

Think of Mary. She professed with her lips her great *Fiat,* an expression of her perfect faith in God; then she embraced what that faith required of her even to the Cross of her Son.

Peter professed with his lips, and professed correctly, that Jesus is the Son of God, but then refused to go to the Cross. God gave him the gift of faith, but Jesus had to rebuke him when he refused to follow him to the Cross.

My friends, the heart of Christianity is this: to profess faith in the Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world and to be his disciples not only in words but also in deeds, by embracing the Cross of Christ by living a life of good works in service of him and our neighbor.

The gift of faith is a pure gift from God.

The gift of works is our gift to God.

*“May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord through which the* *world has been crucified to me and I to the world.”* Gal 6: 14

Is your faith alive or dead? Can you profess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and Savior? If you can, rejoice, because God has given you a great and necessary gift. Can you live out that profession with a life of good works, a life lived with the heart of Christ himself by loving him and each other even to the Cross? If you can, you will become holy and enter into your heavenly reward.

Look at the Cross! There is no way around it. There is no way around the necessity of a faith life alive with good works. Yes, we must first profess with our lips and then we must confess with our lives the heart of Jesus. We must love with the heart of Christ, doing what is right. We must demonstrate our faith by the way we live our lives, by the way we care for others, clothing them, feeding them, protecting them, teaching them, housing them, healing them, forgiving them…. These are the good works that show that our faith is alive, not dead.

Is your faith alive or dead? Will you profess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and Savior? Will you confess by your good works that your faith is alive and well, ready to embrace the Cross of Christ and lead you to the resurrection and eternal life in heaven?

What will you do?