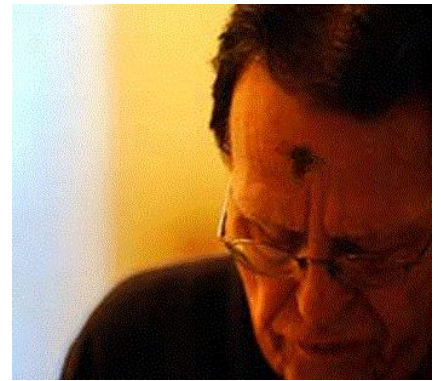


Lenten Reflections for EOHSJ

Ash Wednesday 2019

Reflection by Rev. Stephen Porter, KCHS



Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

"When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who

love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

"But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

"But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

'Hypocrites' is an awful word, and to be called a hypocrite is an incredible insult, unless, of course, you are... Jesus uses it three times in Ash Wednesday's Gospel – for those who like to be seen doing good: publically giving alms, publically praying, and publically fasting. And yet... doesn't the Church ask us to do all these things, and not just in Lent, but especially in Lent! But what does the word 'hypocrite' mean?

The Greek word as used by St. Matthew in the Gospel originally meant an 'actor', *one who declaims a role, is in the persona of another*. So, Jesus' teaching here is – simply put – **Be Yourself!** You are who you are, be who you are, and be humble about it, and – yes – your reward will be great in heaven. I learnt that from the nuns who cooked and cleaned for us when I was in seminary. They would have heavy lifting, or difficult jobs, and would round up a few seminarians from time to time to do it. Mother Superior's "thank you" was always, "Your reward will be great in heaven!"

So, yes, be generous with what you have, and share. Pray a lot, for everyone always – the good, the bad, and the ugly! And fast! We Catholics have forgotten how important that is. Remember Lent in the old days? Fish Fridays were not an option, and where I grew up it was fish Wednesdays as well. But whatever you **do** do, do it within your heart, do it with a smiling heart, do it with a humble heart, and your Father will see, and that's all that matters.

Rev. Stephen Porter, KCHS, was invested in the Order in 2003 and has led pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Fr. Steve is a priest of the Diocese of San Bernardino, and serves at Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Community in Beaumont, California.