

Oct. 14, 2020
Wednesday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time
Gal. 5:18-25
Psalm 1:1-6
Luke 11:42-46
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The catch phrase for the Gospel reading today can easily be: “Practice what you Preach.” This was often on my mother’s lips, especially directed toward me as I would pontificate on high and then be a snob toward my brother.

The woes that Jesus directs toward the Pharisees and scholars of the Law are an indication of their many difficult conversations. Paul, too, is wrangling with the Galatians about their behavior.

Both Jesus and Paul are giving a clear lesson about how life in the Spirit (and in the Spirit of the Law) should be lived. So: “Practice what you preach.”

A relief from these confrontations comes in the Psalm response helping us to redirect our ways into following the Light of Life. And that is what we all desire to do.

Actually, though, I always think that no one can practice everything they preach. If we were only judged on that, I would tend to be pretty quiet about a lot of things.

It is because what we are about and what we strive for are so very large: Life in the Spirit—Union with God, perfect charity and good works that match our ideals and our words. This is a very high bar—a lifetime of personal work.

We keep trying, yet which one of us with all our desires and inspirations hasn’t bumped into our limitations and same old pitfalls or blind spots? Even the illuminated ones who seem to live in the rare air of sanctity can get prickly on a bad day. We might even have grouchy moods.

What then, do we do? How do we practice the life of the Spirit—the Gospel that we preach? The answer is in the word “practice.” That is the drawing board we go back to every day. The age-old but sure exercise of a daily examine is one practice that cannot only put a check on ourselves but, better, help us to be more conscious the next day.

There is more, of course, that we do in practicing.

These thoughts are the doorway into tomorrow’s feast—that most practical and down-to-earth saint: Teresa of Avila. She had a way of putting the feet of her mystical heart on the ground. We are most fortunate to have her as an IHM patroness and to study her life and her teachings.

Can she be a woman for our own times? I think so.

She remains a light shining through the centuries and illuminating the darkness. A woman fully human and fully alive whose common sense, understanding of human nature and union with God touches into the reality and the need in our world.

Her unique, authentic voice asks to be heard even as she speaks with gentleness and the inner quiet of a contemplative spirit. Her life, not unlike our own, had struggles, failures, misunderstanding, confusion, and some clarity and striking successes. Her experience of life kept her feet on the ground. Her experience of God in her life and world kept her heart soaring to new heights.

In her writings, Teresa sets before us beautiful images of the spiritual life: *The Interior Castle*, *The Emerging Butterfly*, *The Four Waters*, *The Divine Game of Chess* and others. Then with patience and persistence, she sets out to give us the steps—and the way to practice the steps—so we ascend to God’s invitation to go higher, deeper, closer.

Here and there, she gives warnings of setbacks and enemies of the Spirit—not unlike St. Paul and Jesus. She is quick to say, “in the face of so many enemies it is not possible to sit with our hands folded.”

One particular enemy of the soul is what she calls the Zone of Resistance. We see it in the opponents of Jesus in the Gospel today.

This very personal trap comes from a divided heart—a mix of light, great desires, zeal (well, all the gifts of the Spirit). But the zone of resistance comes from the other side. Paul has quite the horrendous list for that. With us, it may be more subtle including discouragement, pride, fear of failure, hanging on to resentment, maybe even a pervasive crabby disposition.

We alone know our list as the Prophet Jeremiah says: “More torturous than anything is the human heart.”

Even with all of that, Teresa cheers us on with her teachings, her steps, her practice. About Prayer, she says the purpose is always the birth of good works. About Reading, she inspires us to follow those whose work and triumph is like our own. About Friendship, she says it is so necessary. We need (and need to give) support and encouragement for our efforts in practicing the way of holiness. About surrender and above all humility—these embrace everything.

Teresa of Avila always taught by acts and her acts were never in contradiction to her words. Not for one moment did she, through fear or weakness, act otherwise than she advised others to do.

Her life was rooted in reality and rooted in love, deeply human, weak like ourselves, yet humble, full of light and full of God.