



*Deep Faith. Courageous Spirit. Action for Justice.*

## **Homily for September 3, 2025**

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This week, our first reading is Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. This first letter is one of his earliest written around 51 A.D., a little over twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and well before the first Gospel. Paul is writing to encourage new converts in their trials and instruct them on what is godly behavior.

In Paul's time, there was suspicion and mistrust of wandering preachers who often took advantage of their audience. To counter this, Paul defends his ministry distinguishing himself from the accusations usually leveled against such preachers.

His motive is not for any other reason but to do what God has entrusted him to do – preach the Gospel, to please God, not his audience.

Paul uses two parental images to describe how he and his missionary companions related to the Thessalonians, sharing their very selves. The first was from yesterday's liturgy: they were gentle among them as a nursing mother cares for her children with much affection. Today's image: 'we treated each one of you as a father treats his children, exhorting and encouraging you and insisting that you walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.'

He wants to strengthen the Thessalonians in their faith because hearing and receiving God's word places demands on them. How one lives as a Christian affects others. Our greatest impact on others is not the words we speak but the example of our lives-the deeds we do; the love, care and compassion we show.

Joan Chittister puts it this way: "Love we can't see isn't love. Love shops and cooks and laughs and talks and tells and plans things that the other person really wants. It is the gift I give to someone who, either never expects it, or has every right to expect it but never requires it."

In the Gospel, we see the opposite of Gospel relationships. We continue reading, from Matthew the Seven woes of Jesus to the scribes, pharisees and to us, if we embody the same attitudes. Jesus isn't wishing them trouble but is firmly pointing out their hypocrisy, failure and unwillingness to work on their own issues (what is on the inside) will bring about their misfortune. They focus on what is inessential and neglect the most important concerns: justice, mercy, compassion and fidelity.



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Jesus reverses what the scribes and pharisees consider essential. We can easily recall any number of government leaders who have neglected Gospel values for their own agendas at the expense of the most vulnerable.

But what about us? As we confront the issues of our day, we might keep in mind some of the following considerations from Paul and Jesus.

May we examine our own hearts and motivations for any form of hypocrisy or non-Gospel values.

May we focus on what is essential and let go of what is not.

May our actions be for God alone, and God's kingdom, and not from any form of grandiosity.

May we be courageous and persevere in the face of opposition.

May we, like Paul, for the Thessalonians, have a fierce love for one another and all the communities with whom we interreact.

May we, like Jesus, work at reversing what the dominant culture thinks is important, and so pursue justice, love, inclusion, fidelity and integrity.

May we, Like St. Monica, whose feast is today, be strong in trials, persistent in prayer and unwavering in faith as we seek ways to respond to the needs of our time.

May we open hearts, recommitting each day, to being and becoming Christ's liberating mission.