

Loving Jesus and keeping His Word

In an election build-up the various party candidates hope that in standing up for what their party believes they will appeal to the voters and get themselves elected to parliament. But all we have is their word and we know the gap between saying something before an election and actually carrying it through afterwards can often be wide.

In last Sunday's gospel, Jesus asks us to love one another but today it's more about our love for Him. He emphasises that it is only those who actually keep His words who can lay claim to loving Him. Following Jesus is not about reciting pious platitudes or quoting passages from the bible but the carrying out of His Will in good times and bad.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus says: "everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a sensible man who built his house on rock. The person who hears but doesn't put into practice is like a stupid man who built his house on sand which subsequently collapsed when the storms and floods arose".

Now the words of Jesus are not confined to the Bible but also come from the Church which is the mouthpiece of Christ. If Jesus asks us to keep His word, then we need to be absolutely sure that we have heard it correctly and interpreted it properly. So we need the teaching of the church in this regard to help us interpret the scriptures authentically and without error. We see an example of this in the first reading today where the church leaders in Jerusalem had the final say on areas of disagreement, such as circumcision, which was a thorny subject among the earliest disciples.

Jesus says: "anyone who hears you (i.e. the Church), hears me. We can't put His Word into action with any degree of conviction if we are not sure if it's true. We are entitled to hear the Word of God authentically so we can make a wholehearted

response to it. If we bypass the teaching of the church and arrive at our own conclusion on important areas of morality we may end up deceiving ourselves.

We can't just pick and choose which words of Christ and His Church we'll take to heart while sidestepping others. We saw in the first reading today where certain men from Judea were changing the word of God to suit their own agenda. In response Paul and Barnabas, guided by the Holy Spirit, had some stern words for them. We can easily be tempted to change the teaching of Christ and whittle down its demands. It's like inventing a fifth gospel which is comfortable and easy to live where we conveniently leave out the inconvenient. Jesus says today: "those who do not love me do not keep my words" and that means all of them without exception.

In ordinary life we're usually upset when someone breaks his or her word to us. In keeping God's word we prove our mettle and show that our 'house of faith' is built on rock and not on shifting sands. "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it".

QUESTIONS

1. Should we vote for candidates in a General Election whose stance on various moral issues are directly contrary to those of the Catholic Church? Discuss.
2. Is keeping the word of Jesus always an uphill struggle or should it bring us inner peace, joy and fulfilment? Discuss
3. When people say that they believe in God and Jesus but not in the Church are they deluding themselves. Does the group think that certain elements of church teaching are not in conformity with what Jesus himself taught? Discuss