

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 30th 2015

It is back to school time and the store shelves are brimming with fresh new school supplies. Bright colored pencils and erasers, notebooks and folders, new lunch boxes and backpacks with multiple zippered compartments. These supplies signal a new beginning. When I was a child we begged our mother to label our school supplies with her beautiful handwriting. While my school years are long behind me and my college aged girls shop for their own supplies I still get appreciate the hope and optimism contained in back-to-school supplies.

My favorite item is a brand new day planner which helps me approach this back-to-school time with purpose. Although I keep an electronic calendar for work appointments the spiral bound day calendar is the perfect place for my to-do lists and goals. Flipping through my new calendar I remembered a dear friend telling me that you can learn a lot about what a person truly values by simply reviewing his or her calendar and check book. (And in light of Laudato Si we should perhaps add shopping bag and recycling bin to the list of items to review.) The wisdom of my friend comes to mind with today's readings.

In today's first reading from Deuteronomy Moses urges the Israelites to carefully observe the commandments of the Lord. The commandments are a clear guide for our actions. In the second reading James tells us to Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world. What a reminder of the importance of living a faith of action in service to others. And in the Gospel Jesus calls out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees through Isaiah's prophesy This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Appearance and tradition and hubris cannot mask sin.

As I pray with these readings I am challenged to have my actions match my faith. And I also reflect upon how sin can so easily come into each day. Jesus shares a list of sins which come from within including evil thoughts, greed, envy and deceit. This is a powerful reminder for me to review how I spend my time.

My daily planner can be a chronical of what is truly important to me in service to the kingdom of God. Do I schedule to attend a festive fundraiser rather than advocate for changes to the systems which promote poverty? Where is the block of time to spend quality time with a friend who is having a difficult time? Does my planner show when I plan to have a conversation with a challenging colleague as I work to improve the relationship? My planner can be my reminder to be a doer of the word.

Today's psalm invites us to live an active faith that does justice:

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;

Who thinks the truth in his heart

And slanders not with his tongue.

Who harms not his fellow man,

One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

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