

In our Gospel reading from Mark, the people in Capernaum hear Jesus speak in the synagogue. Mark tells us that “The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.” I wonder if that sort of sentiment is responsible for a certain video going “viral” on Youtube. The title of the video is “Why I Hate Religion but I Love Jesus,” done by a young man named Jeff Bethke. After reading the Gospel passage, I decided I needed to look at the video, and see what all the notoriety was about. On Youtube, I noticed that there have been many responses to the video, both in support and in rebuttal.

I can see why the video has gone “viral.” The young man expresses his love for Jesus, and his desire to live out his faith. He refers often to the conflicts that Jesus had with the religious authorities of His day, and relates them to what is going on today in organized religion. As I understand it, he sees religion as man-made, and a source of hypocrisy, out of touch with the real issues facing people, and responsible for much of “man’s inhumanity to man.” A lot of what he says is true, and I think one of the challenges presented to us by both the Gospel reading and the video is that we try to make sure that our teaching and our living out the faith does not resemble that of “the scribes,” that is, only concerned with certain externals.

So, how do we live out our faith in an authentic manner that proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ and meets the needs of people? On one hand, that is a question for each generation and culture to answer in its own way. On the other hand, as was mentioned last week, some things are constant, and cut across generational and cultural lines. Those things have to do with forgiveness and compassion. They have to do with making peace and working for justice. They have to do with listening to the Spirit, and loving as Jesus loves. In the Catholic Church, as well as others, ritual is important. To listen to God’s word and share in Jesus’ sacrifice empowers us to go forth and be true disciples. To be faithful to prayer puts us in an attitude of thanksgiving and humility before our loving God. To be authentic, the meaning of the ritual has to be lived out in addition to celebrating Mass on the weekend.

Very often, church people are seen as hypocrites. In some ways, we can’t help being hypocrites if you define hypocrisy as not practicing what you preach. As we are all sinners, we all come up short on that criterion to one degree or another. For me, hypocrisy really has to do with using religion to do harm to another; to profess Christian love while at the same time doing violence to another, either physically or emotionally or spiritually.

Though we are sinners, we can practice our religion and live out our faith with integrity, by the grace of God. Though we may not be able to work miracles, as we see Jesus do in our Gospel reading, we can help drive out the demons that so often possess our society: violence, greed, prejudice, fear, ignorance and apathy.

For some, the Gospel of Jesus is still “new teaching.” Truly following Jesus can still cause astonishment. But, as St. Paul says in our second reading, we can be

“free of anxieties,” put our trust in our loving God, and love the world, as Jesus loves us.

May God continue to bless us all, and may we love Jesus and practice our religion.

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP