

Trinity 8
St. Matthew 7:15-23
July 24 – 25, 2010
“Beware”

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On the last day many will say to Jesus, *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?”* And He will say to them: **‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’**

Here is the irony: they seem to be obsessed with the Law. They explicitly point to their own works. They say, *“Lord, did we not do this and that good thing? Didn’t WE prophesy? Didn’t WE cast out demons? Didn’t WE do mighty works?”* And yet He calls them workers of lawlessness.

Scratch a legalist, one who depends upon his works, and you’ll find one who denies the Law and its power. This is because anyone who relies upon his works makes light of the law. He must make it small and easy to keep.

There are many people in our society who believe that God will reward those who live decent lives, that God is more impressed with those who do good works than those who don’t. *But what good works are they doing? Dropping a plastic bottle into a recycling bin? Giving a dollar to the children’s hospital? Bragging about their African-American friends? Can our God have such low standards that he will be impressed by such little effort? Does God really think you should be rewarded because you mowed your lawn or put away the laundry? Are these good works good enough?* To call our small, half-hearted efforts **“good works”** is a form of lawlessness. It has not respect or fear of the Law.

The Pharisees thought they could prevent themselves from ever misusing Our Lord's Name by not using it all. They thought they could keep the 6th commandment if they refrained from having actual, physical love affairs. They were **deluded**. They destroyed and denied the Law. They were self-righteous and therefore lawless. But in the midst of it all they thought they were keeping the Law.

It would be a shallow observer who could not see the hypocrisy and arrogance in almost every modern call for tolerance. No one asks for tolerance of those things he actually respects or thinks are good.

Strangely, it is hard to tell legalists from antinomians even though the names make it seem as though they are opposites. In fact, they are both workers of lawlessness. Because they rely on works of some sort and destroy or deny the Law. Doing good works, even casting out demons, will not get you to heaven. Because your good works are never, never good enough. Even our best works are tainted by sin, and those things we hold up as **"good works"** are almost always shallow and fleeting. *Who can eat sumptuously every day, spend hundreds of dollars each month on groceries, and then brag about dropping a \$20 in the Salvation Army bucket at Christmas time?* Only the most arrogant and pathetic of people, which is to say, us. Repent.

What can you do to enter heaven? Nothing. You can do nothing. And that is a good thing. Consider Our Lord's words to the His disciples after the feeding of the five thousand: They said to him, **"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"** Jesus answered them, **"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."**

Jesus doing a play on words here. To do the work of God is to do nothing. It is only to believe, that is to receive the One whom He has sent to be a sacrifice for sin. It is not to cast out demons and do good works, to feed the poor, to tolerate minorities, to be sad about the whales. But it is to have demons cast out of you, to have good things done to and for you by grace. It is not to create good

fruit but to get credit for fruit you did not produce. Remember also the sheep on the last day who protest Our Lord's praise and say, "**Lord when did we ever see you hungry or in prison, etc?**" They get credit from God for works they did not do. They get credit for the works of Jesus. To do the works of God is to be loved by God, to be forgiven, to be fed, to receive His gifts. On the last day you will not say, "**Lord, Lord, look at what I have done.**" You will say, "**Lord, Lord, thank you for all you have done for and to me, God be praised.**"

John's Gospel continues: **(The disciples) said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."**

But what about this business of fruit and false prophets? Isn't that a call to judge the pastors by their works? Indeed. But the first work of the prophet is prophecy. The first thing to be judged is his preaching, which is to say, the first task of the Christian is to be a theologian. There is danger here also. Because all the followers of legalists and antinomians are theologians, they just aren't very good at it. So how can we be spared their fate, especially when most of them are smarter than us?

We take three books in hand: *the Bible, the Catechism, and the hymnal*. You are not expected to be an expert in all things Biblical. But you should have some familiarity with it and you should study it. It is not too much to say that you should read the Bible every day. You are not an expert, you are student. The Lord speak through His Word. Your ears will be tuned to the Divine pitch and when false prophets come you will recognize that something is off. Even more importantly, you need to study the Catechism. It is the surest guide. It not only springs forth from the Bible but it leads you back to the Bible. Stick to the Catechism. Judge your Pastor by this standard and you will never go wrong. And finally, the hymnal, or more specifically, the liturgy. The Church's worship also guides you and hands over its wisdom to you. All of these books require ongoing attention, but if you are paying attention, you will never be misled.

And what do the Liturgy, the Catechism, and the Bible show us? They show and deliver to us Christ the Giver, the Redeemer who reconciles sinners to His Father by His death and resurrection, the Victor over sin, death, and Hell who loves us and welcomes us back as His own dear children and bride. They proclaim grace, the Gospel, the Good News of our righteousness in Christ.

The Tree of the Cross has borne the best fruit. It has fulfilled the will of the Father and restored creation. That fruit – the Holy Body and Blood of Jesus is put into you, grafted onto you. So if you have the Body and Blood of Jesus, the fruit of the cross, grafted onto you, in your heart by way of your mouth, you have the best fruit and you are pleasing to the Father in every way, and that fruit, the work of Jesus Christ, follows you into eternity and gives the angels cause to sing. Thus you bear good fruit and have been found in God by grace.

In ✠ Jesus' Name. Amen.