

Conversation Starter

For the week of November 2 to 8, 2008

This week's theme: What Reward Do You Want?
Current sermon series: Living For Jesus
Sunday's Readings: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13 & 17-20 Matthew 23:1-12

In Sunday's gospel reading, Jesus' words were very critical of the religious leaders known as the Pharisees. These are just some of the things Jesus said about them:

- They do not practice what they preach.
- Their teachings and practices do not bring freedom, but place heavy burdens loads on people.
- They do not help people who are burdened.
- They exalt themselves by the clothes they wears and by sitting in the places "of honour" at banquets and in the synagogues.
- They intentionally do their so-called "good deeds" for all to see.

And what is their reward in doing these things? Nothing at all -- according to the teachings of Jesus found earlier on in Matthew's gospel: *Be careful not to do your "acts of righteousness" before people, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)* Ouch!! There is no reward if someone's motive in serving God comes from selfishness, self-centredness, wanting to be seen/noticed by others even if the deed or work "on the surface" appears to be good, noble and worthy. As followers of Jesus, our motivation for helping others, proclaiming the gospel, serving God, and obeying His commands must flow out of our love for Him. In other words, our love for the Lord should lead us to desire heavenly rewards over earthly rewards such as the "praise" of people, material wealth, promotions and so on. Remember these words of Jesus: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)* So, then, what treasure do you want? OR to use the words of the sermon theme: what reward do you want? Living for Jesus is about desiring and acquiring heavenly rewards even if it means forgoing earthly rewards.

1. Describe a time when you helped someone, did something good or fulfilled an "act of righteousness" for the wrong reason. What were your motives? Why was the "pull" to do this so strong? Was the earthly reward you received ultimately satisfying?
2. What are some of the rewards available to us given by our "Father in heaven"? How do we acquire these rewards OR to use the words of Jesus: how do we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven?
3. How do we come to the place in our lives where we desire heavenly rewards more than the earthly ones?
4. How does living for Jesus differ from living according to the ways of the Pharisees?

If time permits, continue past this point for further discussion:

5. In what ways does the message found in this well-known hymn lead us to a life of wanting heavenly rewards?
6. Based on the words of this hymn, do you see your present spiritual life as one where you are living for Jesus and/or living for yourself and/or mainly living to please others? Explain your answer.

**Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.**

**Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use every power as Thou shalt choose.**

**Take my will, and make it Thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.**