

Faith+Good Works=Authenticity
September 12, 2021, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 8:27-35
Fr. John

In the letter of St. James, the author makes a very blunt statement:
'Faith by itself, if it has no works is dead'

The diocese of Yakima Washington has a rather unique approach to priestly formation. Those preparing for the priesthood are not only expected to study theology, philosophy, and the scriptures but also to spend the better part of their summers living and working with Mexican migrant workers in the vineyards, orchards, and fields in that part of the country.

As they work and labour together, often in 100 degree F. temperatures, both parties benefit from this interaction. For the migrant workers it gives credence that the Church has not abandoned them and for the seminarians it is an exposure to the stories of the struggles and hopes of these people who are often underpaid and exploited.

The bishop of the diocese, Joseph Tyson tells his priest candidates: *'If you want to elevate the bread and wine, the fruit of the vine and the work of human hands at the Mass, I want you [our priests] to know what it takes to get that to the table. We need to be involved in their lives. These people in the fields are our parishioners as much as anyone else.'*

At times Bishop Tyson himself is out in the fields with the migrants - one of whom who didn't recognize him said: *'What have you done? Have you made your bishop mad?'*

The point, of course, is that faith requires ministry and ministry requires service - being there **for** and **with** others in sharing their hopes and their sufferings. Jesus made that quite clear to Peter and the other apostles who were only thinking of privilege and entitlement when chosen to be his closest disciples.

The reading from Isaiah [which is part of the first reading of Good Friday] refers to the prophet in terms of the Suffering Servant who is able to stand firm in faith despite all of the abuse, threats, and humiliations cast his way.

As servant-leaders and ministers we don't always have answers to the 'slings and arrows' that life presents us with. Sometimes, the only thing we *can* do is to walk with people - shoulder to shoulder like those seminarians and migrant workers in the fields and orchards. Learning how the other half lives.

When we look at the configuration of a cross, we see two lines - one is vertical, the other horizontal. They intersect each other. The vertical line represents our personal relationship with God in our prayer life, our liturgies and practices of devotional piety.

The horizontal line represents our relationship with others and our environment.

If we regard the cross figure, not so much as a religious symbol or the object on which Jesus died, but rather as a kind of scale that measures how authentic our faith is, where would we line up?

Too much of the vertical might indicate a highly individualized and idealistic spirituality - a kind of 'pie in the sky when you die' religiosity. Too much horizontal, and we leave God out of the picture.

Jesus points us to that point of intersection, which he modelled perfectly. When we arrive there or anywhere near there, we meet Christ. The question is: where do we find ourselves on that scale?