

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them.” Don’t you think it is kind of a relief to hear this sentence from our gospel this evening? After all, we’re Lutherans and we can certainly be reluctant to show any sign of piety in front of another person. Not only because to many of us, our faith is a private matter, but we do not want to get odd looks from other folks, sometimes I’ve noticed we can even be reluctant to pray before a meal if we’re dining out, or if we have guests. So go ahead, you can utter a sigh of relief!

But you know it was just last year when we were in the gospel of Matthew that we were told to let our light shine before others, that they might see our good works and give glory to the Father. And of course when you leave this evening, many, maybe all of you will have the sign of the cross on your forehead. So what’s going on?

First of all, remember we’re not doing this to impress our Lord. Jesus doesn’t want us looking gaunt from fasting, wearing sackcloth and ashes, no he doesn’t want that all. Jesus wants us to get up, to go out, to clothe those who are in need, to give food to the hungry, shelter to the homeless, to help change the world for the better. That’s what our Lord wants.

What else does Jesus expect from us? Give but not in an ostentatious manner, pray but not in a preachy style that sounds like God is receiving a sermon along with everyone who is listening. And if you’re going to fast make sure you have a doctor’s okay, but don’t do it to lose weight during the Season of Lent. If you give up something, then donate that something, or the equivalent value, to the food shelf or to someone in need.

We are to live our faith, share our faith, but not for an audience, not to receive praise from our fellows for our deep piety and faith. If you are hoping for a reward there, then, you are told by Jesus, you have received your reward. Don’t be like the hypocrites, don’t be like someone playing a part. But you know, if you let your light shine, it will be noticed, it will be witnessed by others, but if that’s our motivation, that others see us and marvel at our piety, well, that’s our reward.

Honestly, I’d much rather have what I do noticed by God, I would much rather be pleasing to Jesus than anyone else. And the ashes you will soon have on your forehead, well that’s not to impress each other or our Lord, with our piety. Instead the ashes are a reminder to ourselves of humility, a reminder that we are dust, and to dust we will return. We are mortal, we are part of God’s creation, and God loves us, and he made us, and we are much loved dust, much loved dirt, much loved mud. And when we think of those things, dust, dirt, mud, we are grounded. Now dear brothers and sisters we are invited to spend this season of Lent knowing and trusting our god is loving, forgiving, giving and merciful. God is our audience, God is our reward, that’s more than enough for us! AMEN

