

## Homily

Fr Anthony Walsh OP

Management speak likes to think it cares, but really doesn't. People are told that no-one is essential, that we are all replaceable – yet nothing of consolation is offered. Often when we try to console people who feel they're being overlooked we say that they are needed and point to some evidence of that.

Genuine consolation, however, is found only in truth. Someone suggested once that when I am tempted to take myself too seriously, when what I ought to do is laugh at myself, I repeat my consoling mantra: 'God does not need me'. Why is that consoling? Well, if God does not need me, then why am I here? *Because he loves me.*

Like everything else in creation, I am not necessary, and the fact of my being, that I exist, shows only one thing: that God *wants* me to be, that his *love* brought me into being and holds me in existence.

If God does not need us, then it is also true that we cannot do him any favours. Only he can do us favours: loving us, gracing us, giving us himself. An idea that plagues religious people is that we can do God favours, as though we can give him something he does not have. In reality God is, as the liturgy says, the 'Giver of the gifts we bring'.

One attempt to do God a favour is the illusion of returning to a 'pure Gospel', to a time of apostolic purity before the Church fell away into human traditions. Today's Gospel which criticises the hypocritical Pharisees in Moses's seat is too often and too readily reapplied to the Church's shepherds who sit in Peter's seat.

This may seem like pessimism regarding the Church, but it is actually pessimism about God. It is doubting God's faithfulness to his Church, for he promised he would be with her always and that the gates of Hades would not overcome her. But true religion, Christianity, is not about what we can do for God, but about what he wants to do for us.

Our faith is God's gift, and it does not remain extrinsic to us. St Paul commends his hearers because they

accepted [the Gospel] not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, *which is at work in you believers.*

What is alien to Christianity, then, is any system of measuring religiosity by accidental features: facial hair, or sideburns, or headdress, or by the

observance of a particular diet. The word of God dwells in us, and we cannot do God any favours, yet he gives us grace.

Nor does Christianity measure religiosity according to religious garb. We have nuns in wimples, and priests in clerical dress, and prelates in cassocks and mitres, with or without colours and piping and the rest, but none of this indicates piety. They only distinguish consecration and purpose. It is a rare and foolish Catholic who will confuse lace and birettas for holiness.

Our religiosity cannot be like that of the Pharisees: *They do all their deeds to be seen by men.*

The honours of the world are pointless. Jesus tells us that we have one Teacher---the Holy Spirit, and one Father---the Heavenly Father, and one Master---Jesus Christ. We do not obey God's new and eternal covenant to win his favour or to be seen by others and win their approval. Rather, God, in his graciousness, draws us into his inner life, the life of the Blessed Trinity. We cannot do God any favours, but he does them all for us, in us.

*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

Only when we accept that we are his humble servants, servants he makes into his children, can we enjoy the tri-personal love lavished on us by the Trinity. Now *that's* true religion.