**Sermon on GOOD WORKS. 26 Aug 2018**

In the Name of the +Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today’s Gospel reading is yet another example of the conundrums of the Bible, and as such, of the teachings of Christ. On the one hand, He states clearly that …Ye shall know them by their fruits … and He goes on to give us a lessen in horticulture. Good fruit from good vines etc. And what about that other classic … *let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven*.

And on the other hand, He notes that many will say … Lord have we not done all these wonderful things in your name … casting out devils, prophesising, done good works … and what’s He do ? Tells them to depart.

So … how do these two fit together ? Do good works … and maybe get ignored, or not do good works and take the chance of not getting into heaven, or of getting into Heaven cos of faith … alone. And what’s Heaven anyway … as we have considered in the past few weeks.

And how do these fit with a Liberal Catholic view. So settle back and come with me on a journey and let’s have a look at several views and supportive quotations, because this argument of entry to heaven being the result of faith and good works or the result of the Grace of God alone is a fundamental aspect of the discord between the Roman Church and the Protestants, for as Brother Andre` Marie noted in his paper in March 2009,

*Whenever the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism are enumerated, one of the most common items on the list is “Faith and Good Works.”*

*The role of good works in human salvation was one of the crucial issues of the Protestant Revolt of 1517, Martin Luther going so far as to interpolate his own spin on the matter right into the Bible**.*

*Calvin picked up Luther’s theme and varied it up a bit, to make it more consistent, and eventually all the Reformers were singing the raucous chorus of sola fides (“faith alone”). To this very day, Catholic and Protestant apologists argue over the issue of Faith and good works as if it were one of the top three subjects of dispute (along with sola scriptura -“scripture alone” — and the Papacy).* As a comment here … the Papacy did not come into existence until the 6th century, and after that, the church leaders went back and filled in all the gaps to make all the past leaders into Popes.

*Brother Andre` continues … Most of what is said and written on the issue of Faith and good works is superficial in that it ignores what lies at the heart of the matter. The real issue is the difference between the Catholic conception of salvation and its Protestant opposite. Essentially, this difference lies in the role each person plays in his own salvation.*

*From the start, it should be mentioned that although Catholicism is one particular system of dogmatic teaching, Protestantism is not. Therefore Br Andre specifies that when he refer to the Protestant teachings on this subject, he refers to the general teachings of the so-called Reformers.*

*As with every religious issue, so too with good works, the individual Protestant is free to believe or reject whatever he wants without jeopardizing his status as a Protestant. It should also be pointed out that, though the position of the Reformers on the issue is still officially believed by Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and some sub-sects of major denominations (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists…), most Protestants believe exactly the opposite of what these others profess.*

*That is, most Protestants believe in salvation by works alone. And Br Andre writes this because, in his personal experience, he found that the vast majority of Protestants believe that one can be saved without any particular faith “as long as you’re a good person and don’t hurt anyone.”*

*This is the opposite views of the Reformers who believe in faith alone.*

He goes on, using that great passage in Matthew 25 as a base, referring to that passage by Christ … if ye have done it unto the lest of these, ye have done it unto me. He says … *The first proof has to do with last things. The final judgment furnishes an excellent argument to prove our point, so keep in mind what we are establishing here.*

*Protestants say that the believer does not have to do good works to be saved. Making that all-embracing act of faith, the Christian is saved and needs do nothing mor**e.*

*The Bible, Brother Andre` says, agrees with the Catholic position, clever twist huh … the Bible agrees with the CATHOLIC view … where I’d have thought the Biblical view was the paramount one, not the other way around … and as a consequence he says … not the Protestant one.*

*In the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ tells of the judgment at the end of the world. The sheep and the goats, representing the elect and the reprobate are gathered into two groups, one on his right, the other on his left. When He tells the elect that they are going to heaven, He says, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered [“hungry,” that is], and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me**.*

*Upon asking when they had done these things, the elect are told, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”*

*Then, turning to the reprobates, he gives them their awful sentence of damnation, which parallels that of the righteous, this time enumerating deeds omitted: “ye gave me no meat” “ye gave me no drink,” etc. The chapter ends with this verse: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”*

So clearly, good works are important. As Andre` says … *certain people go to heaven because they did certain things*, *others are cast into hell because they did NOT do these things.*

*Can it be any clearer*, our scribe asks ?

No … but is it right ? Not if you ask St Paul, who in Romans 3:28 notes … “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith [alone] without the deeds of the law.”

We’ve all heard it before … justified … saved … by faith. Now note the inclusion of the word “alone”, which was not present in the original KJV document but is present in more recent translations of the Bible. Did Christ say … by faith … or did He say … by faith alone ? And in the end, are they the same anyway ?

It seems a good editor beats a good writer.

I suspect that given that Christ had not long before told us of grapes, thistles and works and then goats, sheep and life-everlasting, He would have not said … by faith alone … or He’d not have also told us to do good works.

Vince Caprizzi in response to Brother Andre` commented: *Don’t forget Brother … If salvation is through faith alone, then poof!! … the Roman Catholic Church suddenly loses its power. There’s no schoolmaster keeping tabs, no indulgences being given, no need for sacraments to balance the good with the bad.*

*Paul was explicit … and Luther just affirmed the obvious. So the reason the Roman Church was threatened by Luther’s argument isn’t due to theology … it’s because it threatened the church’s power.*

AJ, another scribe in the Facebook exchange some five years ago noted … *“I can see how some would be confused by what the Apostle James had to say … but Ephesians and Romans are crystal clear … and the only way to change them … is to change Scripture.* Ephesians 2: 8-9 says … for by Grace you HAVE BEEN saved through faith (note the use of the past tense, essentially denoting pre-ordaining) and not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, NOT of works, lest anyone should boast.

He goes on to remind us in Romans 10:19 … That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.

Nowhere does it mention anything besides grace and belief … case closed, he argues. He further notes that comment by St James in which he says: “ye see then how by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”.

These two comments seem to me to support the whole Matthew 25 story, so in which case, I again ask … how can it be by faith and nothing else ?

And we have a few more to consider.

In Paul’s letter to Titus, 3:8-15, we find:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”

St. Paul adds in Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So one thing is clear … no matter the number of verses versus contrary verses, I suspect that the jury will be out on this subject for a very long time, for it is a fundamental aspect of the discord between the Roman Church and most others.

So what does the Liberal Catholic Church have to say ? I think it’s best summed up in our Summary of Doctrine … not that a church such as ours has doctrines … but in Item 6, we note:

We have ethical duties to ourselves and to others. *‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind.  This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.  On these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets’*(Matt. 22:37-40).

It is our duty to learn to discern the divine light in ourselves and in others, that light ‘*which lighteth every man’* (John 1:9). Because we are the children of God, we are all inseparably linked together.  We all share His life.

That which harms one, harms all.

Hence we owe it as a duty to God, both within ourselves and in others, to live up to the highest that is in us, thereby enabling the God within to be more perfectly manifested in our lives; and also, to recognise the unity of all humanity by constant effort towards unselfishness, by love of, consideration for, and service to, our fellow human beings.

The service of humanity, reverence for all life and the sacrifice of the lower self to the higher, are laws of spiritual growth. Is it any wonder we are Liberal Catholics … seeing the values, the good, in all aspects of the argument and yet we still find a way forward.

In the same way as it’s near-impossible for any of us Christians to separate our faith from the desire to do good works and to serve our fellow man, I think it’s equally unnecessary that we do.

So let’s conclude our fireside chat at the very start of our faith. As we found in last week’s chat, it is written in Genesis that Abraham was saved by his faith. But think on this … how was he to give expression to this faith? The answer is simple … by doing the works of God, as asked of him. So it comes down to this … we have Faith … and it follows as night follows day … should do works.

So we’d better make em good ones.

And now to +God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three persons in one God, be ascribed all honour, might, majesty, power and dominion, now henceforth and forever more. Amen.

Let’s now resume our service with the Act of Faith.