

Pastor's Column

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I Did Not Come to Call the Righteous but Sinners

Over the years, I have heard many reasons (excuses) as to why people say they believe in God, believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and yet say they are not members of a Faith Community and that they do not need to go to Church.

One of the most common excuses is, "The Church is full of hypocrites...They come into Church to praise God, look holy, say nice things; and then, during the week, they sin in all kinds of ways."

My usual retort to such a comment is: "Can you imagine how bad they would be if they didn't come to Church?"

In excuses like this, and others, people like to direct attention to others and not critically look at themselves.

In the Gospel today, we hear the words of Jesus, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Hopefully, in these words, we find comfort! We are all sinners, we all "fall short." But in our worship together, in our prayer and praise, in our celebration of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and in our activity in a Faith Community, we struggle to move forward, inch by inch, to become better people.

If we can acknowledge the weakness and sin in ourselves, it is easier to understand and accept the weakness and sin in others.

At times, we all feel like hypocrites. We know the right thing to do, the Gospel thing to do. Yet we do not do it. Then we have a choice to make! Do we come to worship with the Faith Community and admit our sinfulness, our weakness, or do we fail to be present to the Faith Community because we do not want to feel the pangs of our hypocrisy?

When we do not want to feel like hypocrites, then we allow pride to take over. We fail to trust in God's love and forgiveness. We do not believe that God can heal us and allow us to "start fresh," to begin over once again. We fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and we allow sin to prevail!

As a preacher, I often feel the sting of hypocrisy. It is one thing to sit in the pews and hear the Word proclaimed and another to preach the Word to those sitting in the pews.

There are many times when the hypocrite is preaching!

It never fails. I may have had a disagreement with someone, unkind words were shared, there is still resentment, and forgiveness is not near. Then Sunday comes, and I need to preach. And yes, as you would guess, the Scriptures are on forgiveness, of letting go of hurts, and the Gospel imperative of the pursuit of right relationship.

I then have a choice to make. I preach as a hypocrite or I don't preach at all. If I would choose not to preach, I would deny God's powerful Word. I would deny God's ability to change my life, and to bring healing and peace.

If I preach, quietly aware of my hypocrisy in that matter, I once again declare my faith in God, in Jesus, the Word of God, and allow the presence of God to begin to take away my sin and to heal me, and to bring me back to right relationship with others.

Being an active member of a Faith Community, and worshiping on a regular basis with fellow Christians, will, at times, allow us to feel the pangs of hypocrisy. That is good! Because that means we believe in the power of the Word to transform, and to heal.

When we fail to be an active member of a Faith Community, when we fail to worship on a regular basis with fellow Christians because we do not want to deal with the personal sting of hypocrisy, we deny the activity of God in our lives. We lack faith in the reality that God can destroy sin and bring healing.

I trust Jesus at His word, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners!"

Fr. Mike