

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B-2024

Madonna's song "Vogue" starts off with the words "Strike the pose." In our culture, we often receive the message that "image is everything." This mentality can affect us personally. More often than we care to admit, we find ourselves "striking the pose." We do so to project a certain image so that we will be accepted, praised, and valued by other people. It is praiseworthy to create a good image if it is an authentic expression of who we are and who we believe God wants us to be to. It becomes problematic when we lose a sense of who God wants us to be and we create false images of ourselves depending on who we are with at any given moment. We run the risk of losing ourselves. Even more importantly, we run the risk of losing our own soul.

This "image is everything" perspective can bleed into our life of faith and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We go to church for image reasons, but our hearts are far from God. We come across as good and faith filled people in public but are very different

behind the scenes. We fall into the trap of simply “striking the pose” when it comes to God and faith. As a result, we develop primarily an external relationship with God and our Catholic faith.

Our Gospel reading provides us with the important revelation that God and faith are meant to be an “inside job.” It is what we continually fill our hearts with that matters the most. It is the quality of our hearts that makes us pleasing or displeasing to God. God’s perspective on this matter is powerfully revealed in the call of King David. He was considered the least likely of his siblings to receive a special calling from God due to his young age and physical stature. But out of all of his brothers, he was the chosen one of God. God went on to reveal His heart on the matter: “For I do not see as human beings do. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.”

Instead of us always “striking the pose,” God calls us to be conscientious cultivators of our hearts. So, are we cultivating them with humility or pride? Mercy or anger? Gratitude or envy? Generosity or greed? Purity or lust? Self-control and balance or excess? Inner drive and hard work or laziness? The underlying and

ultimate question becomes, “Are we cultivating our hearts for God? As we cultivate them, we are called to go from simply “striking the pose” to focusing on the content of our character before God, ourselves, and other people. Our emphasis on the content of our character comes from a place of authenticity, integrity, and a genuine desire to be more fully united with Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Ezekiel, God offered the Israelites a promise that equally applies to us: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give to you, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will put My spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to observe My ordinances.” Through the Holy Spirit that we receive in Baptism, God gives us His very heart. And the more we open our heart to His heart, He gives us more of His heart. He provides us with the growing capacity to love as He loves, see as He sees, be merciful as He is merciful, be wise as He is wise, and to be holy as He is holy.

With a renewed awareness that God looks into our hearts, I have three questions for us to consider. How

can we build the content of our character in our interactions with other people? How can we be inspiring and thought provoking witnesses and help others to grow the content of their personal character? And even though we are called to be loving and respectful towards all people, how can we better surround ourselves with people that will help grow the content of our own character?

We have established that it is the quality of our hearts that helps us to positively or negatively work out our eternal salvation. I recently watched a You-tube video from the beloved Fr. Michael Schmitz. He was reflecting on the issue of salvation and how many people today have reduced salvation to the issues of being a “good person” and being “nice” to other people. Even though these dispositions of heart are truly pleasing to God, he reflected on how Jesus personally taught that there is more to it than that. Jesus revealed that doing His will was necessary for salvation. He proclaimed these soul stirring and stretching words: “Not everyone who says Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.” These words are so essential for us in face of our watered down,

cultural understanding of salvation. Think about it this way, we can be the nicest person in the world, but knowingly and freely make habitual choices that are seriously against the will of God. We can be a good person in so many ways, but consistently make personal and moral decisions that are seriously contrary to God's revealed will.

We are called to continually strive to do the will of God in every aspect of our lives, with the help of His amazing grace and abundant mercy. I would like to share a litany of ways we are called to do God's will, even though this list is not exhaustive. I share it in this format because there can be a tendency for us to be uncertain of what it may involve. We are called to do the will of God by making Him our First Love and loving Him in all things and above all things; relying on and depending on Him through prayer and personal relationship; through the attitudes that we cultivate in our minds; the words we speak to and about other people; how we treat and serve other people; our moral decisions, including our relational and sexual choices; the type of entertainment we indulge in; our priorities in life; issues of honesty and integrity; and faithfully living out the responsibilities of our work and

our God given vocation in life.

By striving to do the will of God in all things, we show Him that we are truly cultivating our hearts for Him. That is the pose God wants us to continually strike! In striking this pose, He gives us more and more of His heart, so that we are united with Him both now and for all eternity. Instead of living our lives with the motto, “Image is everything,” we begin to base our lives on “God’s image of us is everything.” It is ultimately the only thing that really matters because it has eternal ramifications. May God’s image of us be our faith and moral compass, and our ongoing hope of salvation.