

Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk

Lord, may the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be acceptable in your sight. AMEN

In our gospel reading today, Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” In reading First John 2:5-6, I thought it summed up the total concept of abiding in the Lord. It proclaims, “By this may we be sure that we are in Jesus: whoever says, ‘I abide in him’, ought to walk just as Jesus walked.” This reminded me of a phrase which was popular a number of years ago. It stated, “Talk the talk, walk the walk.”

A friend of mine named Angela, who recently endured cancer and chemo treatments, is a person who “Talks the talk and Walks the walk. I could see that her spiritual relationship with the Lord sustained her during her battle with cancer. She rarely complained about the illness, but she must have suffered during the treatments. However, the real suffering, which I saw in her eyes, was that she had to draw back from her “Kairos” ministry and probably doubted that she could return to it.

For many years, as a part of the “Kairos” ministry team, Angela would visit a prison for women during a weekend program. The weekend consisted of a series of talks, discussions, meditations, and creating “Prayer-and-Share” groups which would continue to meet weekly within the prison facilities after the weekend event.

During her illness, Angela could not go into the prison to participate in the weekend experience, but she continued to share a part of this ministry with others by asking them to sign up for a time period in which they would pray for those attending the weekend. After the sign up, each individual's first name would be placed on a paper prayer chain which was shared with the weekend participants so that they knew there were others connected to them in spirit during that event. Amazingly, this month Angela hopes to be going back in-person to participate in her prison ministry as her cancer treatments are finished and she is in remission.

In our First Reading today from Acts, we receive only a small part of an amazing event! In the full story from Chapter 10 in Acts, we observe how Peter “Talks the talk and walks the walk”. The chapter opens with Cornelius, a centurion who is a Roman army officer. Cornelius gave alms to the Jewish people. Drawn to the belief in God, he was accustomed to praying constantly. Cornelius practiced Jewish forms of prayer and had a vision while he was praying about three o'clock which was the time of Jewish evening prayer. In this vision he saw an angel of God coming to him and calling his name. The angel commanded him to send messengers and summon Peter to Cornelius' residence.

As a messenger from this centurion was traveling to get the disciple; Peter was at prayer and had his own vision in which all of the creatures of earth were lowered on a sheet and were considered clean by God. Although Peter experienced this vision three times, he was puzzled by it.

Clarification for Peter's doubt or "perplexity" about the meaning of the vision began with the arrival of the messengers sent by Cornelius. The Spirit indicated that Peter should accompany the messengers back to Cornelius without hesitation, because the Lord had sent them. Therefore, Peter's observance of the traditional Jewish prohibition against associating with Gentiles was overridden by God's own initiative in commanding Peter to go with the messengers.

This opened a new vista for Peter and upon meeting with Cornelius, he said; "God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean." This brings us to today's First Reading from Acts where Peter was proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of Christ to Cornelius and his household. We heard, "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." Peter's doubts vanished and were replaced with astonishment! He confirmed his new belief that the Holy Spirit was available to Gentiles by having them baptized.

Scholars note that the telling and retelling of this event, in chapters 10, 11 and 15, takes up more space than is given to any other narrative in the Book of Acts. In fact, over time, this event began to be called the "Gentile Pentecost".

In addition, this story is crucial in the eyes of the early church. We are told in Acts 15 that Peter mentions this event to the Council of Jerusalem. This gathering of early Church leaders met to debate whether one had to convert first to Judaism to be baptized into the Christian community. In the end, it was decided that anyone could enter the Body of Christ through baptism without first converting to Judaism.

Just like Angela and the Apostle Peter, we are called to “Talk the Talk”! As we abide in the Lord during our daily prayer time, we might ask ourselves: Are we open to new ways of prayer? Do we feel that our prayer connects us to others in our world?

We talk to God in prayer about our doubts, our hopes, our sorrows, our joys, and our concerns for others. Imagine if we asked the Lord this question the first thing every morning – “Lord, what are ***you and I*** going to do ***together*** this day which will renew my relationship with you and the world around me?”

Did you notice that the prayer chain in Angela’s story kept the chain of the Lord’s love unbroken by praying it forward and befriending others? Did you notice that in Peter’s story both he and Cornelius were connected through their prayer with the Lord? Isn’t it exciting that our prayers connect us to others both near and far away? Isn’t it exciting that the Lord can work wonders through those connections?

We are, also, called to “Walk the Walk”! As we discern the ministry God calls each of us to in this world we might ask ourselves: Are we open to changes in our ministry? Do we act on those changes?

God gifts us with an everchanging and vibrant life, in which we are called to listen to his words and be open to a new way of living in them. In order to continue prison ministry during her illness, Angela was called to make prayer chains. In understanding that the Holy Spirit was available to all, Peter was called to preach to *both Jews and Gentiles*.

Daily we are called to “Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk” with the Lord. If we accept this challenge it can be an exciting journey which will continue throughout our life in this world and into eternity!

I pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.