

John said to Jesus, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

Let's do an experiment.....

Richard -

What if we were friends.....which we are.....and what if there was something about me that drove you nuts that was actually wrong spirited. Name something that is wrong spirited that can occur in relationships between friends. *Aggressive behaviour*

What if I said to you Richard, I know it drives you nuts when I am aggressive towards you. I know it makes you feel belittled, demeaned and scared. I promise to never be aggressive towards you again and if I am, as a penance, I will promise that if I do so happen to be miserly - which I am sure I won't because I promised - then I will go to Church the following week to make up for it. Sounds fair, right? Would you give me a chance?

What would happen if a couple of days later..... but then I went to church, and so that makes up for it, right? No harm, no foul? Sorted.

What would happen if a couple of days later again.... but then I went to church and so that makes up for it again ... right? Sorted - problem solved. Are we still good? Great, because I think that I have worked out a system. I know how to do this now.

Sooooo the next week but then I went to church - and so not only am I now the most regular attender in the congregation (which should automatically make me a model person) but I have paid my debt, wiped away my issue. Problem solved so are we still good?

Soooooooooooooooooooooooooooo what if I just slipped right back into the habit of doing but I kept my church attendance up. What would that mean?

It probably means a few things - that I have stopped respecting my relationship with Richard and I am moving into tokenism - I have stopped respecting my promise and I am making empty gestures.

This is what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel, where people were moving into a mindset that was empty gestures without having to change their hearts. Where if they did something wrong, they would make the appropriate sacrifice to atone (which had to be ritually salted by the way - Lev 2.13: You shall not omit from your grain-offerings the **salt** of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer **salt**.) and then get on with their lives. It is interesting because this sacrificial system that was sealed with a salt covenant was originally an expression of gratitude for the gifts that God had given his people, but over hundreds of years, for some people it started losing its meaning. By the time we see the life of Jesus - some people had forgotten what it was all about. They had moved from a system of gratitude, to a way of paying off debt, like a fine. Sacrifice made, slate wiped clean, until the next time. Rinse, salt and repeat. The system was broken, salt had lost its saltiness. This is the very system that Jesus was speaking out against. Where people make empty gestures and tokenism in their relationships with God. Now also remember, a lot of these rituals cost money, so if you were well to do, then you could wipe the slate clean as many times as you want to. Now, if you were a child growing up with this happening around you what would you learn? You would learn the same thing.

There are issues in our lives where you can still see these things happening: adultery, theft, lying, greed, addictions, and domestic violence. Things in our lives that genuinely hurt us, hurt others and go against God's call on our lives. Empty tokens are tempting in these cases. Because they are easier than attempting to fix the real problems.

Jesus tells us that this isn't the culture we should live in and this isn't what we should teach each other, let alone our children. A life of gestures and tokens that have lost their meaning. Where relationships of care, empathy and genuine affection have been replaced with symbols instead of remorse and changing our hearts. In fact, Jesus said, this sort of emptiness would be worse than living in Gehenna (which is the rubbish dump outside of Jerusalem, full of vermin, rotting waste and smoldering remains). Jesus is

quite harsh on people that have no accountability and continue to do things that harm others and our relationship with God. Who have no self control. He tells us, if we find ourselves compromised, get out of the situation, find another way, don't just go down to the depths saying 'You can't help it'. Because you can, and you are called to live another way. 'Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another'. In other words, don't rest on empty gestures, have integrity, change your life - because that is how you truly show respect to each other, respect to yourself and respect to God.

Jesus calls us to 'Repentance', to 'Metanoia', which is an ongoing, active every day change of our hearts. To not be afraid of changing our minds, changing our behaviours and changing our lives for the better. To be people of integrity and let our word be our bond and let our life be lived in gratitude to God. Having salt in ourselves. Because this is how we make God rejoice and this is how we show our respect for our relationship with God. This is how we answer God's call on our lives. We don't have to worry about losing God's love, because God has given it to us without reservation, through the love that Jesus showed in his life, death and resurrection, which should be an inspiration to become better people. Love should inspire us to be the best that we can be. If it doesn't it probably isn't love. Our lives should be led and filled with gratitude as a symbol of our God, with salt in ourselves. So we should be asking ourselves today, what is it in our lives that we can change to better reflect the person that God call us to be - and really set about changing ourselves, heart mind and soul. So that we can have salt in ourselves and be a peace with one another.