

The Word gives what it demands

The Lectionary is a wonderful thing, that is: the plan the Church has for which passages of Holy Scripture are to be read and preached upon on any given Sunday through the Church Year. It relieves a Pastor from having to come up with something to preach about - apart, of course, from that which must always be preached. It also relieves the congregation from having to listen to what the preacher was able to come up with himself!

A few weeks ago the Lectionary had me preach on a passage of the Letter of James that brings interesting truth to light: "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them: 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what good is that? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

At first it might seem that James is teaching morals here; along the lines of when the holy Apostle John writes: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." But at second glance, it becomes clear that he is teaching about true faith as living faith, as opposed to a dead one, one that does not have the life of God in it; that a true faith cannot be without effect in the way one actually lives and behaves, because living faith is not what one thinks and believes as much as it is the love of God alive and at work in the believer!

As useless as a well-wisher who does no good, so useless is faith that only consists in what one thinks, and does not have the life of God in it.

Similarly useless, also, is preaching that admonishes people to "be saved", but withholds that Word of salvation by which sinners are actually saved; useless is preaching that hammers it into the heads of people that they need to "have a personal relationship with Jesus", or to "live with Jesus", but does not speak that Word of salvation by which our Lord Jesus relates to sinners and gives life.

The Word of God of His salvation is not a word that tells us to be saved, but leaves us to our own devices to do that. Rather, it is His promise of salvation, won for us with the sufferings and death of Christ; and with that promise, He gives His salvation to us, and His own life, so that we believe it, and are saved. His Word of salvation is anything but useless. And that is the point - of everything.

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