

JUNE 18 2025, MSGR. ROBERT NUSCA

Today's readings lead us to reflect on the nature of true discipleship. They emphasize the importance of generosity, joyfulness, and humility in our dealings with others, while also calling us to trust in God's providence.

In the first reading, taken from the Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul states clearly that God loves a cheerful giver. He cautions that whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, while the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. This imagery from the natural world would have resonated strongly with the original audience. But far beyond the world of farmers' fields and abundant crops, Paul is leading us to reflect on our own generosity towards others and to place deep, abiding trust in God's divine providence.

This message is especially relevant today. In our time and culture, many people experience increasing levels of stress and hardship in their daily lives—financial difficulties, uncertainty about the future, fear, and a sense of hopelessness. These are common struggles. Experts point out that young people in particular are experiencing higher levels of sadness and depression. Studies show a troubling combination of depression, anxiety, and even what some have called an apocalyptic fear of the future.

During this jubilee year, it's especially important to pray for renewal in hope—and also for the grace to become living signs of hope to those around us. The Papal decree for the jubilee year, entitled **Spes Non Confundit** ("Hope Does Not Disappoint"), suggests that we are pilgrims of hope, always anchored in hope. At the same time, we are called to abound in hope as we bear credible and attractive witness to the faith and love that dwell in our hearts.

The decree offers practical suggestions for responding to the sadness so many feel. It invites us to offer simple acts of kindness—a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a listening ear, or a good deed. Through the Holy Spirit, these small acts can become rich seeds of hope for those who receive them. Let us plant the seeds of hope.

In today's Gospel, we find our Lord continuing His instructions in the Sermon on the Mount. He invites His followers to embrace a deep and genuine faith—a true faith. Jesus cautions against spiritual hypocrisy in the practices of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

It's helpful to remember that the Greek word for “hypocrite” refers to an actor—someone who performs for others, pretending to be something they are not. Commentators explain that the spiritual hypocrite is motivated not by the glorification of God or love of neighbor, but by a desire for self-glorification.

So our Lord warns against superficial displays of piety. He challenges us to consider His teachings within the broader context of the higher righteousness He calls His disciples to live out in the Sermon on the Mount. When virtuous actions like almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are done out of true love for God and neighbor, they are most admirable. But when performed to draw attention to ourselves, they become self-righteous and insincere.

St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminds us to be aware always of our oneness with Christ, just as He was always aware of His oneness with the Father. Our activity is truly genuine and apostolic only insofar as we permit Christ to work within us—through His power, His desire, and His love.

So in all the good we strive to do, let us begin with purity of intention. Let all our interactions be done with the aim of bringing the love of God the Father and the love of Christ to those around us.

St. Augustine teaches that our works are pure and pleasing in God's sight if they are performed with a single heart—that is, out of true charity, with an intention fixed on Heaven. Let us fix our eyes on Heaven, on doing God's will, and appreciate how our Lord's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount offer a coherent, unified vision of life in this passing world.

In these teachings, Jesus shows us that God desires to stand at the very center of our lives, our relationships, and our world. Commentators have long noted that Jesus wants everything to revolve around God—around Christ, who is the supernatural center of gravity for our hearts and souls—always through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we meditate on our Lord's teachings, we see how they overturn the world's conventional wisdom. The Gospel invites us to a renewed perception, helping us learn to see the world as God sees it. We come to understand how far the world's values and power structures are from God's wisdom.

Again and again, Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven operates with reversed values: the first shall be last and the last shall be first. The Church Fathers speak of the mirror: Jesus invites us to look into this mirror and contemplate His teachings in light of what is reflected back to us through the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we strive to see ourselves as we truly are, as God sees us—and ultimately, to see the world as it ought to be when we live in accord with the Divine Will of the Heavenly Father.

At the same time, we must be cautious of external societal influences and internal, self-serving spiritual attitudes that can lead to a shallow, self-absorbed version of Christianity. There is a real danger of living the Gospel in a way that is more about feeling good and appearing good

before others than about living in accordance with the radical demands of true discipleship.