13th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE DISCIPLE'S PIETY
West Henrietta - 1961

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 6: 1-8; 16-18 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.... Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a dad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

A football player who was named All American in college and who then entered professional football wrote an article that was titled, God Keeps the Score. This football ace was a dedicated Christian. He was loved by all of his teammates for his clean living and his sense of fair play. The theme of his article was that the score on the scoreboard was not the most important thing. To him it was more important that he should play the game well and not do anything that would displease his Heavenly Father, The applause of the grandstand was always second to the applause of God. He had changed one word in the song that he loved, and instead of singing, The eyes of Texas are upon you, he sang, They eyes of Jesus are upon you.

What a contrast there is between this young athlete and that of the Pharisees who lived in Jesus' time. Whenever they would contribute to the church or give to the poor, they made sure that there was an audience around to witness their charity. Jesus accused them of saying long prayers in public places and of wearing phylacteries to be seen of men. When they fasted, they made certain that others were around to observe their piety. To the common people of that day they were the most religious and most respected people on earth. Thus, it must have been a terrible shock to the disciples of Jesus when He said to them, Except your

righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites and told them they were as whited sepulchres - beautiful on the outside, very respectable, but ugly on the inside. He accused them of keeping the outside of the platter clean but of never washing the inside of the cup.

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When Christ called men to discipleship, He called them away from themselves and the desire to be appreciated and applauded by men. If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. There is no room here for a piecemeal and patchwork type of morality. To follow Christ is to stop going your own way and to start going His way. It is a radical reversal! It is a complete turning to God and a living for God without reserve, without calculation, and without self-consciousness -- that God in all things might be glorified. It is a life given to God with the same reckless abandonment with which Christ gave His life for a lost world. (Does this kind of reckless living seem impossible to you? It is not!)

Christ Himself makes this kind of discipleship possible. It was for this that He, (the only Son of the Living God) God's unique & beloved Son, came into our world. It was for this that He became one of us. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Though above the law, He willingly obeyed where each of us had refused to obey. He lived the kind of life that each of us should live, but cannot. He died that death that, except for the fact that He died for us, each of us would have to die. He took the whole curse of our sin upon Himself and died in our place, because that was His Father's Will. He died for us, because He loved us, and because He would stop at nothing in order that we might be His own and live under Him in His Kingdom. And now, as St. John so beautifully put it, to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name. In Christ we are sons of God. In Christ we are God's children. It is significant that Jesus uses the phrase your Father no less than 9 times in the 18 verses of our text. They point out a tremendous truth concerning Christian piety.

There is no self-consciousness in a child's relationship to its parents. The child knows his parents love him. There is nothing to prove. There is no pose or pomp in the family circle. When your little boy suddenly throws his arms around you and gives you a big kiss, he isn't interested in impressing the neighbors with his love for you. When your little girl brings you a handful of flowers that she picked herself, this is a natural and spontaneous expression of her love, not an attempt to prove to others what a fine girl she is. If only we could learn this lesson.

So much of what we do in the church is done to be seen of men. We crave self-recognition and praise. How often has it not been said, Well, if that's all the thanks I get, that's the last time they'll ever get anything out of me! We want full credit for what we do and what we give; and we often boast about how Christian we are, and how much time and effort and money we have put into the church -- as though we were doing it only to be seen of men, and not for God at all. In a town in New England one church felt that another church had a bell larger than theirs, so they got a new one. Not to be outdone, the other church also got a new bell. Thereupon the first church installed a still larger bell, and the other followed suit. Then the first church put in such a big bell that, when they rang it, it cracked! All this proclaiming of one's greatness ends in nothing but cracked bells. The true child of God desires no publicity to advertize his piety; no trumpets blare to announce it; no left hand points to the right hand as it does its labor of love.

The same thing holds true of our worship and devotional life. The disciple prays behind (shut) doors in the quiet secrecy of his room, alone with His Father. Jesus words, of course, are aimed at the parade of prayer, not at common public prayer, as is obvious from the fact that the prayer which He Himself gave His disciples is a we prayer; where all pray, but where no one is conspicuous. E. Stanley Jones, great missionary to Africa, tells about watching a man dancing on a raised platform before an idol as an act of devotion to god. He did very clever

things with his feet, such as standing on the sharp edge of a brass vessel and moving it up the platform while standing on it. As he went through very difficult performances his eyes were fixed on the idol with a look of devotion, but he was not indifferent to the applause of the multitude. His eyes were on the idol, but his evident desire was that the eyes of the multitude should be on him. Very often our very acts of devotion are a bid for popular approval.

Self-denial and self-restrain likewise easily become a means drawing attention to ourselves. Fasting, which is to be an expression of our sorrow over sin and an aid to singleness of devotion toward God, often sinks to the level of a spiritual show. In self-pity we are usually quick to let others know ~~what~~ how much we have given up for the Lord, how much we have to do in the work of His Kingdom, and how much responsibility is resting on our shoulders. So we go about arranging our martyr's crown, unaware, of course, that it may really turn out to be a fool's cap. A man fasting with a long face is not religious, he is rediculous. What real fasting says, it says to God; it need not and should not be ~~manifested~~ paraded before to men. The fasters who disfigure their faces in order to cut a figure before men have no place among the followers of Jesus.

The disciple is good and does good in secret. But this secrecy is not the secrecy of the proud or oversensitive or embittered recluse. It is patterned after Jesus, who did not withdraw from people or turn away from the need and agony of His fellow men. Jesus' injunction to secrecy is not in contradiction to His command, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works. Jesus is not speaking against doing good works before men, but the doing of good works to be seen of men for them to glorify us. If the purpose of letting our light shine is that people will glorify our Heavenly Father and not us, than what we do is perfectly Christian. The publicity will take care of itself.

The disciple is set before God as his Father. He can look to God for reward only as the child looks to his father for reward, not because he has deserved or earned a reward but because he knows the love which has made and called

him child. The hypocrite, the man who divides his heart between God and man, cannot ever quite trust God for the ultimate reward, and so he settles for his reward here and now in the approval and praise of men. God rewards only His sons, for all His rewards are rewards of grace, put into the beggars' hands. The unbelief of the hypocrite gets what it expects and seeks: They have their reward, paid in full; the faith of the child gets what it hopes for.

It is interesting to notice how Jesus describes the Last Judgment in Matthew 25. He describes how the righteous ones would be rewarded because they fed Him when He was hungry, and quenched His thirst, and gave Him a home, and clothed Him, and visited Him in distress. Then Jesus pictured them as reacting in complete surprise and asking when they had ever done these things: Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? That for which they were being rewarded was done unconsciously as the overflow of a God-filled life. May God give you such piety as this!

Amen.