

"Thoughts and prayers" are simply not enough. With love, we must ACT... Fr. Paulson Mundanmani, our pastor, reflects on John 3:16.

Today, we heard the most popular verse in the Bible: John 3: 16. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.."

No single verse has impacted the world as much as John 3:16. The specific context of John 3:16 is a conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee, a teacher of the law.

Let me tell you a story.

On their way to get married, a young Catholic couple is involved in a fatal car accident. The couple found themselves sitting outside the Pearly Gates waiting for St. Peter to process them into Heaven. While waiting, they began to wonder: Could they possibly get married in Heaven?

When St. Peter showed up, they asked him, and he said, "I don't know. This is the first time anyone has asked. Let me go find out," and he left.

The couple sat and waited, and waited. Two months passed and the couple were still waiting. While waiting, they began to wonder what would happen if it didn't work out; could you get a divorce in heaven? After yet another month, St. Peter finally returned, looking somewhat bedraggled. "Yes," he informed the couple, "You can get married in Heaven."

"Great!" said the couple, "But we were just wondering, what if things don't work out? Could we also get a divorce in Heaven?"

St. Peter, red-faced with anger, slammed his clipboard onto the ground. "What's wrong?" asked the frightened couple. "OH, COME ON!," St. Peter shouted, "It took me three months to find a priest up here! Do you have any idea how long it'll take me to find a lawyer?"

Now Nicodemus is what I consider a combination of a priest and a lawyer. He was a religious leader among the Jews, but, at the same time, as a Pharisee, he was well versed in the Mosaic Law.

The Gospel passage is an exchange between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. There wasn't one Pharisee with whom Jesus had a good relationship, as far as we know.

In his Gospel, Mathew records scathing denunciation of these religious leaders of the Jews.

The problem was that the Pharisees, in attempting to honor the Word of God and manifesting an extreme form of religious observance to the laws, were actually the farthest from God.

They were guilty of false religion and pretense. They promoted phony faith, which was merely external observance, with no intrinsic change.

Let me ask you a question. How many of you have used the expression, "Our thoughts and prayers are with you" in a letter, a call, on the FB? I see it often on FB.

Some of us even do more. A couple of days ago, I was visiting one of our parishioners who just returned from a surgery. As I entered the house, one of their neighbors showed up bringing pots and pots of food.

We hear this expression from our leaders in government all the time. The phrase "thoughts and prayers" has been devalued by politicians and citizens whose prayers seem never to move them to act against their self-interests or the interests of those who lobby them.

In the recent months we have had many tragedies – the wild fires in our backyard, landslide in southern California, devastating hurricanes on the mainland as well as Puerto Rico and massive shootings at schools, churches, clubs and even a couple of days ago a few miles away in Yountville where 3 beautiful women were shot.

It is amazing that our leaders have a hard time rising above their own personal interests or those of the ones who placed them there and come to solutions that are right for our nation or for our children or those affected by the tragedies.

Jesus called the Pharisees white washed sepulchers- beautiful on the outside, but rotten inside.

Their external display of prayers never moved them to ACT with compassion and love.

What is amazing is the message that Jesus delivers to the Pharisee. “God so loved the world that he gave us his only son ... not to judge, not to condemn, but to save.”

To a man who represented the magisterium of the Jews; to a man for whom the very observance of the law would lead him to condemn and judge others; to an institution that would eventually judge and condemn the Son of God to death in accordance with their laws, Jesus said, “God loved the whole world...”

He underscores two important words- not to judge, and not to condemn.

Jesus defines religion as love. It is not a commitment to commandments or precepts, but to a God who truly loves us and wants to save us.

There is no room in our faith for judgment or condemnation. Jesus would go out there after his conversation with Nicodemus, and love at the expense of breaking the law.

He would say to a woman caught in sin, “Your sins are forgiven.” He would ask for a drink from a woman who had been in and out of 5 marriage relationships and bring her home and make her a missionary.

He would dip his body in the cup and give it to Judas who entertained thoughts of betraying God himself. For Jesus it was a commitment to love.

Can you imagine what CTK would be like if we were all about thoughts and prayers, but no action?

Let me put it this way. If we had wonderful liturgies here at CTK with great music, adoration, strong Marian devotion (all of which are great), but we did not do any of those things that we are known for...

Imagine if we didn't open our facilities to accommodate homeless families for Winter Nights in a few weeks...

Or if our St. Vincent de Paul did not offer food and comfort to over 20,000 plus poor people...

Or if we didn't partner with Monument Crisis center, Shelter Inc...

Or if we refused to show solidarity with our school children when they will march our streets soon, asking for change. These children have seen bloodshed.

If we were a community known for our thoughts and prayers, but we harshly judged the immigrants and refugees with disdain and condemned the poor as being lazy, CTK would be a phony church.

What makes us special is our CTK motto: Hear the Gospel and make a difference.

We follow a God who loves us truly. We hear His Word and make a difference in our lives and those of others, especially the most vulnerable in our midst.

Grace is our ability to rise above our personal interests, our personal opinions and political affiliations and do the right thing in accordance with the Gospel.