

Views from the Pews: Hearing and Doing

Lent is coming up. It's a good time for self-examination. If at no other time of year, now we should make the effort to think about how far our lives and words demonstrate the fruits of the Holy Spirit available to any Christian. They include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (*Gal. 5:22-23*).

When we consider how the full harvest of such fruits can transform a life, it seems astonishing that anyone would not want to do *whatever it takes* to earn them. Yet our own every day experience is that the opposite characters somehow come more easily, however much the consequences make us suffer. Why is that so?

An ancient inscription said it all:

I am the Way, but you do not follow Me.

I am the Truth, but you do not believe in Me.

I am the Life, but you do not live in Me.

If you're unhappy, don't blame Me.

In short, if the Christian faith does not lead us into the love, joy, peace and other gifts anticipated by Paul, that is not because Christianity has failed, but because we so seldom actually *live* it. How many of us can truly say, hand on heart, that we have consciously, earnestly, attempted every day to live as Jesus commanded? How will we who call ourselves Christians stand before him on the last day, and answer his burning question:

'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I tell you? (*Luke 6:46*)

Fortunately for us, God is very patient with us, even when it takes us a long time to get his message. Jesus had many arguments with the self-righteous Temple authorities of his time, who believed that their upholding the letter of the Law whilst ignoring its spirit guaranteed their salvation. So he told a parable that gives us hope that God understands, and will see us as more like the those who do, eventually obey God's will:

A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' (*Matt 21:28-31*).