

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Before the Gospel lesson begins, Thaddeus, one of the twelve, asked Jesus a question: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Then, as you heard, Jesus gave His response:

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, "I am going away, and I will come to you." If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word...Whoever does not love me does not keep my words." It sounds simple enough. A mark of one who loves Jesus, who follows Him, who is a believer, is keeping His Word. And why not? If you love someone, you tend to pay more attention to what they say or write; you tend to hang on every word they say, soak it in, and cherish it. So it should be with one who loves Jesus, they keep His Word: they pay attention to it with meticulous detail and are keen to observe everything He says by it.

Conversely, the mark of one who does not love Jesus, and you can read that to mean either as one who hates Him or who is otherwise indifferent towards Him, is not keeping His Word. If you do not like someone or are otherwise indifferent towards them, you will most likely ignore what they have to say. How often do you change the TV channel when someone you do not care to hear is about to speak? Or, perhaps you hang on their every word, looking for something to complain or argue about (definitely not to soak it in and cherish it). And, this is how it is with those who do not love Jesus—they either ignore what He has to say, simply don't care about it, or care enough to hear it in order to contradict it.

And I've brought this up many times before: Jesus did not say "obey" here, but "keep," which is more at guard or watch or cling to. And it's a good thing, too. While everyone should certainly obey everything He commands, doing so is an impossible ask in this sinful flesh, and this not only with regard to Jesus' commands. Husbands and wives refuse instruction from each other. Children refuse instruction from their parents. Students refuse instruction from their teachers. Parishioners refuse instruction from their pastors. And now, you're supposed to believe a Christian will, without question, accept instruction from Jesus, and that by doing so, they prove themselves a believer, a follower, a lover of Jesus.

Dear hearers, if in hearing this passage, you heard Jesus say, "If anyone loves Me, he will obey My word...He who does not love me does not obey My words," you have been duped by the Great Deceiver. Oh, what a great lie he has spread, and what a snare he has set. If you have fallen for this trap, then what is left for you to believe is one of two things:

1. I do love Jesus, therefore I do obey His Word without blemish, without sin (because of my love for Jesus), therefore, as the rest of the passage indicates, the Father loves me, and He, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have come to me and made their home with me, or
2. I do love Jesus, but I have not obeyed His Word perfectly every time. So, I must not be loving Jesus hard enough or well enough, so I fear, as the rest of the passage conversely indicates,

that the Father does not love me, and He, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have not come to me and have not made their home with me.

Either you believe that you love Jesus and have proven it with your perfect obedience to His Word, which is false, or you believe that you want to love Jesus, but think that by your imperfect obedience to His Word you have proven that you do not love Jesus, which is also false. In short, you have been deceived to believe that your love of Jesus (and, by reciprocation, God's love for you) is dependent on your obedience to God's Word.

To number 1 can be said, "If you say you have no sin you deceive and the truth is not in you." (cf. 1 John 1:8) To one such as this, the full force of the Law must be proclaimed, the Word of God which, without hesitation or modesty calls a sin a sin, and calls such a person to account for it, despite and in spite of their belief of perfect obedience. For, it is as this Word, supposedly obeyed perfectly, declares, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away," (Isaiah 64:6) and, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one," (Romans 3:10-12) and again, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..." (Isaiah 53:6ab) There is no escaping any of this, for the Word declares this to be the truth of everyone.

With number 2, however, there is required a little more work and explanation...a little more from the Word of God.

Therefore, devil, the world, and one's sinful flesh will do their damndest to move them from number 1 to number 2, and convince them that this deception is the truth.

- They will hurl all sorts of temptations at you. Something will provoke you to anger, and in this anger, to sin. Or who can say that there hasn't been an occasion (and an occasion taken) to tell a little lie in order protect one's interests? Therefore, you have transgressed God's Word, not obeyed it, and God must not be with you. Therefore, you must not love Jesus.
- They will bring about illnesses, physical hardships, emotional hardships, and other such setbacks that are designed to cause you to doubt God's presence. Therefore, you must not love Jesus.
- They will bring about lustful desires: another's husband or wife or someone unwed with whom you would like to "get together with." Or, it could be an object not in your possession. For all of these, you will work at ways to obtain them, some in ways that seem proper and legal, yet others not, even if the Word of God instructs otherwise. Once again, you will have transgressed God's Word, not obeyed it, and God must not be with you. Therefore, you must not love Jesus.

These are designed to be a barrage against you, to cause you to stumble and doubt, to bring about hopelessness, and ultimately a cry against God in defiance—to do as Job's wife encouraged Job to do: "Curse God and die." (cf. Job 2:9) "There is no hope—what is the point—might as well get it over with and curse God and die."

However, once again, I declare that what Jesus said is good news. The word He used is not "obey" but "keep": guard or watch...or cherish or cling to. "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word"—guard it, watch it, cherish it—"and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." The one who loves Jesus will hang on every Word He says and soak it in and believe it. It is the very same word which says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The one who loves Jesus keeps this word, too—they guard it, watch it, cherish it—they believe it!

In other words, God's love for you and His dwelling with you is not dependent on your obedience to His Word. You have not obeyed His Word, but transgressed it and borne in yourselves iniquity. But, God loves you because He created you, and out of that love for His fallen creation (and you a part of that), sent His Son to bear that iniquity, to take that iniquity from you and lay it upon Himself. He, then, bore that iniquity to the cross where He felt the full wrath of His Father for it, in your place. The Word of God declares this against a hopeless world to bring hope, and that is something to

keep, to cling to. Where is perfect obedience? It is only in Jesus Christ—He was perfectly obedient, yet still bore the full wrath of God for the sins of the world—and He was perfectly obedient and suffered God's wrath for you!

Furthermore, keeping the Word of God—guarding it, watching it, cherishing it, clinging to it, believing it—is not something you come to by yourself and on your own merits, but something that is brought about in you by the dwelling of God with you. It isn't up to you, and that's a good thing! God dwells with you and in you in order that you would keep, guard, watch, cherish, and cling to His Word. For, if you keep, guard, watch, cherish, and cling to His Word, then you have what they bring: repentance and forgiveness of sins—the things God wants to give you. Today's Gospel alludes to that, for it is there that Jesus says, "[T]he Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." The Holy Spirit is at work in the Word to bring you God's gifts, in order that you would keep the Word, in order that you would receive God's gifts...what a precious circle this is!

That is also the answer to Thaddeus' question. For, as heard in the second reading for today, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and had them speak this Word of God to the people gathered in Jerusalem so that each of them could hear it in their own language. And by this proclamation, the Holy Trinity dwelt with their hearers that day to give what the Word of God gives, repentance and forgiveness of sins. "So those who received [their words] were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41, slightly altered)

You also were added to them. Still, to this day, the Holy Spirit is at work. He is at work to do today what He did that first Pentecost Day. He is at work in you to bring you to repentance by the Law of God and give you the forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel of God, the Gospel which says that the LORD has laid on the Son the iniquity of all and that He felt the full brunt of God's wrath that you deserved—and if the Son of God got the full brunt of the chastisement due you, then there is none left for you! "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

No, all that the Father has left for you is grace and mercy. It is mercy by which do not get what you deserve on account of Christ: eternal damnation for sins committed. It is grace that gives you what you do not deserve on account of Christ: remission of sins and pardon. Look to the cross of Christ, dear hearers, for there it is that God exercises His grace and mercy on your behalf. Therefore Jesus says,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

You have peace against that hopelessness which the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh seeks to bring about in you as they attempt to convince you that God is not with you. You have peace because God is with you; you have His Word on that!

You have peace, peace which the world cannot give: peace with God. You have His Word on that, you keep it—guard, watch, cherish, cling to it, and believe it—for in it you find and have salvation. In it is declared to you this truth: you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.