

A Pointed Challenge

This Week's Readings at Mass

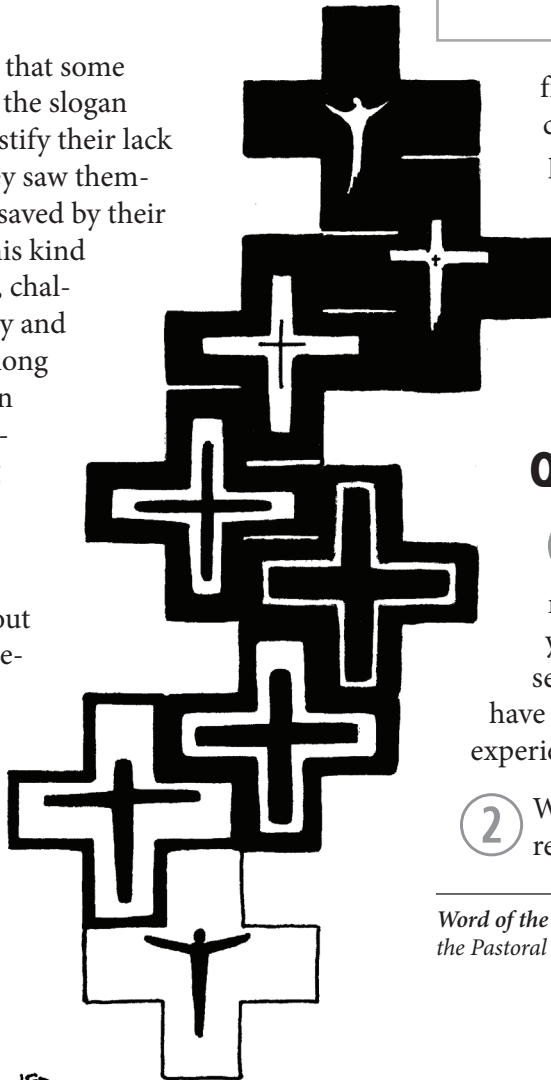
- ▶ Isaiah 50:4-9a - Salvation through the Lord's servant
- ▶ James 2:14-18 - Faith and good works
- ▶ Mark 8:27-35 - "Get Behind Me, Satan!"

Rather than focus on the Gospel, we will reflect on the second reading, from the Letter of Saint James. This week is the third of five consecutive weeks we hear challenging words from James.

A few decades before James wrote this letter, Paul wrote that Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, not "by doing the works of the law" (Gal. 2:16). His point was that it wasn't external actions or "following the rules" that could earn someone salvation—it was faith in Christ.

Unfortunately, it seems that some Christians began using the slogan "faith over works" to justify their lack of good deeds since they saw themselves as automatically saved by their faith. James counters this kind of thinking in his letter, challenging social inequality and economic injustices among his readers. The modern equivalent of James' critique would be wishing a homeless person well or sending "thoughts and prayers" to people who are suffering without doing anything concretely to help them. "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead," he writes (Jas. 2:17).

Paul would have agreed with him. We can't earn our salvation by good deeds, but actions should flow



OMIGOSH! I THINK I MIGHT BE THE MESSIAH!

RELAX, BERNICE. YOU'RE NOT.

ARE YOU SURE?! I FEEL LIKE I'M THE ANOINTED ONE!

COCOA BUTTER CAN DO THAT.

Who do you say that I am?

Sheepish Question:
What realities help me stay humble before God?

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from our faith. It may not be comfortable or convenient for us to interrupt our lives to provide the homeless person on the corner with a meal or warm clothes, but that is what our faith asks of us. James doesn't want his readers to forget that or excuse themselves from such obligations just because they can claim to have faith in Christ.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Do you know people who make a show of having faith although you rarely see evidence of it in action? Do you know of people who consistently do service and justice work, whether or not they have explicit faith in Jesus? Please share your experience with such people.
- 2 What are you particularly challenged to do in response to this reading?