

I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to say a few words about motivation. It seems to me that that's at the heart of our Gospel reading for today. Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order that ye may be seen by them." That's what he's questioning. He's questioning the "why" we might practice piety.

There was nothing wrong with the practice that He was describing; it was the motivation of the practice that he was questioning. And we see that too in the...reading. God was questioning why they were doing what they were doing, and Lent is a time to examine our motives. It's a good time to do that and our motivation gets to the very core of our being and helps us understand who we truly are.

My father learned this a difficult way. My father was a vicar, big influence on my life. He'll be appearing for many homilies, I'm sure, in weeks and years to come. He once came into our youth group when I was a young person. There was a woman there who was quite a delicate young woman and had embarked on a relationship with which everybody else in the group thought was unhelpful. My father the vicar came into the group, had no idea about this, pointed to a badge on her sweatshirt and said, "What's the motif?" She said, "None of your business," ran out and never came back to church again.

He realized on reflection that although he'd said, "What's the motif," i.e. What is your badge representing? What this young woman had heard him say was, "What's the motive?" And of course that was a question heavy on her heart and was a very deep and penetrating question that really we dare not ask of others very easily, but in Lent we might dare to ask of ourselves. What's the motive?

Jesus, in his passages, as I've said, is saying don't practice piety to impress others. That's not a good enough motive for doing whatever you do that you think is pious. Spiritual discipline should not be there to impress others. Neither, if we look at the reading in 2 Corinthians, do we practice piety to impress God. God doesn't need to be impressed by our acts of piety.

What Paul says in that reading is, "Be reconciled to God," but he says that after he's already said, "God

has reconciled us to himself in Christ Jesus." Our righteousness, he says, is in Him. We don't need to practice piety to earn favor from God because the point of the Gospel, as Paul understood it, is that message of Grace. That there's nothing we can do to make God love us more, there's nothing we can do that might make Him loves us less, because all that has been necessary for our salvation has been done through Christ Jesus. What he calls for, is a response to that great act of righteousness and mercy.

We don't earn God's favor, but we might ask ourselves how we best respond to the favor that God has shown us in Christ Jesus. So we don't practice piety to impress others. We don't practice piety to impress God. So why should we reflect and embark in this season of Lent on any acts of discipline or reflection or whatever practice we find helpful or have found helpful in the past?

The only motivation that Jesus and Saint Paul would suggest is appropriate is whatever we can do for us to get to know God better, to deepen and develop our relationship with Him. That's the only reasonable motivation for doing anything different in Lent. What helps us get to know God better - that's what motivates us.

There's no virtue in self-denial if it's an end in itself. We might deny ourselves if we think that will help us get to know God better. That's the question we should ask ourselves. What is it that we can do? What can we do this Lent that will help us deepen our relationship with God?

So I invite you this Lent, to embark on the scary process of examining our motives. Maybe asking at the end of every day, "Why did I do that? Why did I say that to that person? Why did I feel that way when so and so said that?" Dare to ask yourselves, "Why did I do that?" And let's look to make contact with that bit in our hearts that seeks to know God better and say, "How could we nurture that part? What can we do this Lent to meet that desire that we have, to know God better?"

Amen.