

*Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same...*

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Many of you may remember several years back the WWJD craze, with *What Would Jesus Do* books, bracelets, pencils and bumper stickers abounding, and they are still popular today. Among some, especially in the schools I attended, one way to prove one was serious about their faith was to wear a WWJD bracelet. And of course, it seemed that to remove the bracelet was to declare that one had lost the faith. Now of course, it was just a bracelet with the initials W.W.J.D., just a tool to remind the wearer to consider what Jesus would do in any given situation. The idea was that by seeing the initials on one's wrist would increase in the wearer a love for Jesus and inspire holiness. The problem though was in discerning what Jesus would do if He was cut off in traffic, or late for work, or had difficult in-laws, and then of course we remember that in imitating our Lord, flipping over tables is also a possibility, though in most of our day-to-day interactions not advisable.

The truth though is that, *grafting] in our hearts the love of the Name of Jesus, increasing] in us true religion, nourishing] us with all goodness, and bearing] fruit unto holiness* is not as easy or simple as wearing a bracelet or putting a bumper sticker on our car. The problem is that we who want to be Christ-like, who want to grow in holiness, often start by asking the wrong question. We may sincerely ask, "*what would Jesus do?*" and then attempt to imitate his behavior in intense situations. But with little to no thought about how we live the rest of our lives in between these situations we might as well ask, "*what would Beethoven do?*" and attempt to play the piano. Holiness, or living as becomes followers of Christ is not

just moment by moment but a lifelong commitment. The better question is *what did Jesus do before such a situation occurred?* What spiritual practices or disciplines enabled Him to remain calm and *about His Father's business*, while constantly being scrutinized by the Pharisees? The Gospels show Him practicing normal spiritual disciplines such as solitude, silence, prayer, retreat, worship, reading and meditating on the Scriptures. In one intense situation, Jesus and the disciples are at sea, and a storm arose that threatened to sink the ship, what was Jesus doing before He calmed the storm? He was asleep! If solitude, silence, prayer, worship, studying the Scriptures and even sleep was good enough for Jesus Christ, it is good enough for us too.

The life of Christ is punctuated with this pattern of solitude and prayer. What did Jesus do before or after every major miracle and revelation that He is God in the flesh? He withdrew for a while; He *went up into a mountain to pray*. Before He was tempted by Satan, He had been in the wilderness, in fact on a wilderness mountain, fasting and praying for forty days and forty nights. After His baptism in the Jordan river by John and just before the Transfiguration, He went into the wilderness to pray. Even in St. Matthew's account of this morning's Gospel, we read that Jesus departed from the crowd, and went up into a mountain by Himself. Our Lord sought solitude, He went away by Himself to fast and pray. And even though He is God in the flesh, even though we might assume that He, who is God, would have no need to go to church, yet the Gospels tell us that He was daily in the synagogues, daily in prayer and worship.

It is interesting how we see these spiritual disciplines put into practice in the Gospel. A multitude of over four thousand has been with Jesus, listening to Him

teach for three days. And Jesus is not moved by anxiety or fear to feed the hungry crowd on the first or second day, but out of compassion and on the third day that they have been with Him. The crowd has been voluntarily fasting while sitting under Jesus' teaching. What better way to receive the Word of God than by fasting? But as the crowd prepares to travel back to their homes Jesus decides to end their fast. Notice, Jesus does not ask, *where may we buy bread that these may eat?* And yet the disciples ask Him, *where can you even buy bread in this desert for all these people to eat?* All Jesus asks is *how many loaves do you have?* He is so confident in the Divine Bounty that this is His only question. Such faith and trust in God to provide is hard for us to imagine. But someone in the crowd had given up their seven loaves of bread and a few small fish, someone was prepared to fast a little bit longer. The Lord honored the humble offering, and the bread and fish were blessed and multiplied, and in the end over four thousand had eaten until they were full, and seven baskets left over.

This miracle must have pushed the faith of the Disciples to its limits. Even though at this point Jesus had already performed a similar miracle and had fed over five thousand people, yet this sort of miracle was not as numerous as His healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and raising the dead. But this sort of miracle is different because it requires someone giving something up for it to be multiplied and given to all. We might wonder if there would have been any miracle at all if there was no one willing to fast, if no one was willing to offer their humble lunch of bread and fish to Jesus. Would Jesus have sent the crowd away hungry, would some have indeed fainted on their way home? We can only speculate; we know and trust that Jesus would have provided. But this all comes down to the question of what is our role in the work of the Kingdom of Heaven, and how do we go about that work,

how are we *bearing fruit in holiness*? We have heard from St. Paul this morning that we are none perfect and yet we are indeed called to holiness. We are reminded that we have been made *free from sin*, and *become servants to God*, and that we have *our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life*. For we were once free from righteousness, but what fruit is there in a sinful life apart from Christ?

It is so easy to get caught up in our busy world and to let the world's standards dictate to us what is important. It is expected that to be industrious and well-to-do we must fill every moment of the day with noise, work, and chores. We are always on the go, striving for that next best thing which has been held out in front of us. While coming away from the busy rush of the world, praying, seeking God in silence and solitude, these things the world looks at negatively. While attending Mass and studying the scriptures the world calls inconvenient and unpopular if not an outright waste of time. *But what fruit had we in those things which we are now too ashamed to even speak of?* St. Paul asks a rhetorical question of us, because there is never any fruit in sin, instead what we find is a never-ending cycle of fear, stress, anxiety, and anger, of never having enough time, too busy to come away from it all and listen for Christ's voice, all that which leads to spiritual death.

And so this morning we pray not for the courage to wear a bracelet that has *What Would Jesus Do?* emblazoned upon it, but that the Lord will *graft in our hearts the love of His] Name*. We need an infusion of the Holy Spirit, writing the Name of Jesus over our hearts and minds to help us come away from the world and choose Christ over all things. And all so that He may *increase in us true religion*, that we are not like the Pharisees of old who's entire religion devolved into externals, but that the love for His Holy Name and His Kingdom takes root in our hearts. We pray for

the courage to trust that He will *nourish us with all goodness*, that He will have compassion on us, as is His nature, that just as it is His nature to heal and raise the dead, so also is it His nature to provide for our needs, we pray for the grace to know that He will not send us away empty handed. And if we are to bear fruit as described in the Epistle, we shall need guarding from dangers and shielding from frosty indifference and boisterous winds of temptation. And so we pray that He will of His *great mercy keep us in the same*, because we will need Him to draw us into solitude and silence, into prayer, worship, and adoration, turning again and again to the Scriptures so that we may know for ourselves the goodness and bountiful provision of God. Amen.