

An Inside Job Ash Wednesday February 10, 2016 8:15 AM Jl 2:12-18;
2 Cor 5:20—6:2; **Mt 6:1-6, 16-18** (We all can do tremendous work for God as long as we
actually do it with the right intention, which has got to be an interior gift to God.)

“And your Father who sees what is in secret will repay you.”

There was at the time of St. Paul a great controversy about faith versus works or faith versus law, and that has a very specific meaning and purpose, which we don't have to go into; but it has colored the history of Christian thought in a way that obscures what Jesus is trying to get at in today's gospel. This is not about faith versus law or faith versus works. It is about works. **It is about praying. It is about almsgiving. It is about fasting, but a particular way of going about this.** For Jesus, renewal comes from inside; it's a matter of the interior, not the exterior. That is the hallmark of his approach to renewal or what you might call **repentance. It's an inside job.**

Now it's all wonderful that we gather together for prayer. It's all wonderful that we will receive the sign of our salvation in the form of ashes. But in itself, that won't do much. What Jesus is inviting us to do is to go home, **“to go into our inner room and shut the door.”** That's what we have to do if we want to really pray. Prayer in assembly is good. But there is something else: **a certain kind of conscious prayer by oneself that he is trying to elicit.**

In no way was Jesus against **almsgiving**, not at all. But **he wanted it done in secret.** Now a few years ago there was an announcement about a very generous gift of a billion dollars by Ted Turner to charity—wonderful, but not in accord to what Jesus was talking about. Twenty dollars from your pocketbook secretly given to a neighbor that you know is in need is more in accord to what Jesus is talking about than a billion from a very well-known billionaire. This is the type of thinking we have to reflect upon. **We all can do tremendous work for God as long as we actually do it with the right intention, which has got to be an interior gift to God** with no

thanks from anybody, in fact, no one even knowing who is giving it. That's what Jesus is eliciting.

He uses the word **“hypocrite.”** Now the word hypocrite in our language means a little something different from in the Bible. **In the Bible it simply means “actor.”** Think about Hollywood and think about how Hollywood actors and actresses are portrayed. There are two different ways. The first is with all the glamour and the glitz, how their famous little soirées or parties or weddings or get-togethers or whatever is such the envy of the world, supposedly. That's one level. But then if you go to the Jewel and you just glance at all the magazines on the way to the checkout, you can see all these real stories, alleging anyway, that the true life of actors and actresses is very tawdry, very shabby, very sad, that they are really depressed, that most of them are divorced or separated or miserable or whatever. Are they true? I don't know. Nobody knows; that's the whole point. **That's outward show one way or the other.**

Jesus' point is forget all that. Forget what the world thinks and what the world says. **Pay attention to something inside of you, the Spirit of the Lord.** “Go to your room; shut your door; pray to him.” He knows what is going on in secret. Look around your neighborhood. Look around your community. Look around your family. **You know who needs something; help them out, but don't let them know you're doing it.** You want to **fast?** That's good; **control your appetites, but don't make a big deal about it.** **“Your Father who knows what is done in secret will reward you.”**