

**Religious and Spiritual**      Ash Wednesday      February 14, 2018      8:15 AM      JI  
2:12-18;    2 Cor 5:20—6:2;    **Mt 6:1-6, 16-18**      (This Lent we can try to work at being  
religious in a spiritual way and being spiritual in a religious way.)

**“And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”**

This whole Gospel reading focuses on the contrast between what appears to be so and what is really so. **What is really so is what the Father sees; what appears to be so is what other people see.** Now this is a division that Jesus deliberately makes; we ordinarily do not. He uses the word *hypocrite*, which is Greek, and actually means actor, so those who take part in plays and dramas are hypocrites. His point is very clearly that religious worship is not a play or a drama that is being performed for the benefit of some audience. **Religious worship is ultimately a matter of internal sincerity and openness and love and generosity**, and that any sorts of benefits or awards or rewards that we get in regard to religious behavior, or worship even, is counterproductive, should not be desired at all, should be completely shoved away, **so that only the Father sees and only the Father knows what we are doing for God.** That way it's really and truly for God; even the love of the poor is really for God. So this is the scenario he sets up.

Now today there are people who say, “Well I'm spiritual, but not religious.” Now that can play into this scenario. **If by spiritual we mean that in my own life I am following the way of God** and what really matters to me is helping the poor, praying to God, restraining myself, living a life of justice and contributing to the common welfare of others, **without anyone even knowing about it**, without anyone even knowing my name, well then **that would be good** if that's what is meant by being spiritual. And **if what is meant by being religious is doing things openly that people praise and admire, well that would be a good thing to avoid.** However that's not the only way we could look at things.

Religion is not simply an outward show. Religion is also a set of symbols, rituals, gestures, and language that leads us to God. So the idea would really be to be religious, **being religious in a spiritual way, letting religious language, gestures, rituals, sacraments lead us to the Father**, who knows all things. **Religion also is about discipline, regularity, so to be spiritual in a disciplined way, in a religious way, that would be very beneficial.**

So maybe this Lent we can try to work at **being religious in a spiritual way and being spiritual in a religious way.** That would really help us grow in the Spirit of Christ, to put on the mind of Christ.