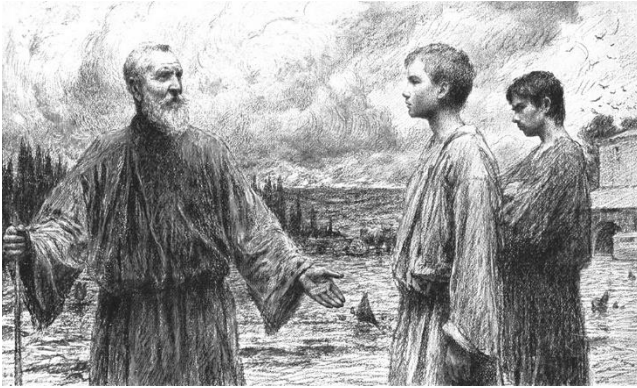


“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of



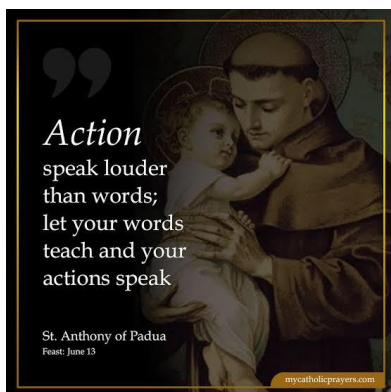
the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him. (Matthew 21: 28-32)

Matthean Theology and Existential Settings

The Parable of the Two Sons only appears in Matthew. Matthew, much more so than the other Synoptic Gospels, places great importance on the virtue of righteousness. Matthew also warns against the evil natures of complacency and hypocrisy. Jesuit New Testament Scholar and Historian – Daniel Harrington – wrote:

“Matthew’s Gospel should be read as one of several Jewish responses to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70. The Matthean community still existed within the framework of Judaism but in tension with other Jewish groups, especially the early rabbinic movement. The point (of Matthew’s Gospel) is that Jesus’ life from start to finish was in perfect harmony with the Scriptures. Or to put it more in keeping with Matthew’s outlook – the Scriptures are in perfect harmony with Jesus’ life.” (Harrington, 1991, p. 17)

Matthew’s Gospel offers a very complex theological, cultural, and contextual framework. There are essentially strong pro-Jewish elements that are grounded in the Torah. However, Jesus is not just a Torah observant Jew. He is a reformed interpreter of The Law. His voice is one of many voices in comprehending and living out the Abrahamic Faith. That said, Matthew’s Gospel contains anti-Jewish elements, particularly in Chapter 23. Matthew’s Jesus denounces the scribes and Pharisees with numerous criticisms including accusations of hypocrisy, legalism, pastoral abuse. Matthew seeks to hold to its Jewishness, while affirming its Christian commitment and openness to Gentiles. (Lee, n.d.)



Living Righteously as Matthew's Jesus did

I think we all know the idiom that “Actions speak louder than words.” Matthew's critique of hypocrisy/empty words applies to our modern paralysis in the face of national and local economic hardship. Many Americans (21%) have no emergency savings. 37% of people living across the nation can't afford an emergency expense over \$400. (The Currency, 2026). An Adams County Fact Sheet published in 2023 states that there are only 36 affordable homes for every 100 extremely low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities needing available rental properties. A worker needs to earn \$19.85 an hour to afford rent for a modest 2-bedroom home. (Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, 2023). These struggles are real in and around our parish. Not everyone can readily afford to pay \$50-\$60 for a full tank of gas. We can't solve every aspect of these difficulties. What aspect(s) can we faithfully and morally solve? I observe that the Minneapolis communities who advocated for their marginalized neighbors offer clear advice. (Taking care of children. Grocery shopping for people who are afraid and/or threatened)

Vulnerable, Interdependent Love

Buddhist Monk, peace activist, poet, and teacher – Thich Nhat Hanh said:

“The source of love is deep in us, and we can help others realize a lot of happiness. One word, one action, one thought can reduce another person's suffering and bring that person joy.”

We are neurologically and psychologically wired to make initial impressions of someone. We immediately determine whether they are safe. We use cognitive and experiential biases in that impulsive process. (American Psychological Association, 2026).

Paradoxically we are very hard-wired for cooperation. Our ancestral inclination is to work as a team with people like us (in-group bias). Thus, true Interdependence requires more intentionality and mutually beneficial bonding toward accomplishing a shared goal with “others”. Everyone must feel they have equal power and importance in relational work. Participants require meaningful, one-on-one time to break down stereotypes and build empathy. Leaders must actively encourage and reward cooperation. (Jesse Koster, 2026)

What's probably most difficult – especially in contexts where people inherently don't trust institutions or their neighbors – is to constantly offer opportunities to build trust in valuable interactions. There's one word that energizes such work – **Vulnerability**.

"Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper or more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path." (Brown, 2016)

Reflection

I close with two thoughts. First, we must believe that there is far greater sacramental value in what we do rather than in what we say. Second, we must become more conscious of how our split-second biases and stereotyping keep us from following Jesus to relieve the suffering of others—especially those we do not yet know.

Blessings along The Way, Jim+