

What's Your Motivation?

What's your motivation? That is a question I heard a lot as I studied acting in college. The question was designed to help me be more believable or natural in my acting. This question is actually a pretty good one to ask ourselves before we are about to do something, especially if we have a choice to do it or not. Sometimes we can do the right thing for the wrong reason.

I think we all have done that. Sometimes we stop at red lights at intersections where no one is around. We could go on through the intersection; no other cars are coming—but something tells you to stop. If that little voice inside your head is saying don't do it because you will get caught and have to pay a fine. Then you are doing the right thing for the wrong reason. If that little voice is saying don't do it. You'll be breaking the law even if no one sees you do it, then you are doing the right thing for the right reason. Do you see the difference? As Christians, we should have a strong sense of ethics. Doing the right thing for the right reason even if no one is there to see it.

In the gospel lesson today, Jesus was pointing out that the Pharisees, who were supposed to be the most righteous members of the faith, were praying in public. There is nothing wrong with praying in public. In fact, people should pray in public. When you go out to eat, you should give thanks to God for the food that has been prepared for you. Including your server in the prayer before your meal at a restaurant is a very good thing to do. There's nothing wrong with that. What the Pharisees were apparently doing was getting everyone's attention first---

“Hey I'm about to offer a Prayer before a meal”—

“Hey I'm about to give a HUGE offering”—

“Hey I'm about to Fast—

“Hey I'm going to give up something especially meaningful for Lent” --- If God has put his Holy Spirit in you...if Jesus Christ is alive in you...if everything that you do is either a result of your love for God or your sense of responsibility for your neighbor—then people will notice. You don't have to do anything extra to get their attention or God's.

One of the things we could all be doing is inviting people to come to church with us. We do something here that no one else in the world can do...unless they are believers and are in church...We worship the one who created us...God. And even our faith is a gift from him...we did nothing to earn it and there is nothing we can do to force God to give us more---but He will. That's what's so amazing about God—he keeps on giving. We owe Him everything because he has given us our lives. You are already special to God so there is no need to make yourself special to others.

There nothing wrong with prayer in public when it is motivated out of your love for God or your neighbor—there is nothing wrong with giving some of your hard earned money to support the work of God, or helping someone who is down on their luck—There is nothing wrong with giving up something for Lent—as long as you are doing it because you love God or want to help your neighbor. We can't make God bless us. We can't say the Lord's prayer as if it is some kind of incantation that brings a magical blessing from God. There is no special word that can give you control over God—you don't need it. God already loves you and wants what's best for you.

So what's your motivation? There are all kinds of ways that we can do the right thing for the wrong reason. Let's just make sure that as Christians we are always doing what we do because we are filled with God's love.