

Walk the Talk

1 Thessalonians 2: 9 - 13 (November 12, 2017)

1 Thessalonians 2: 11-13.

11As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, 12urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. 13We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Historical Context

Recent scholarship on the economic realities of the earliest Christians has shown that landless craft-workers like Paul worked extremely hard to make a meager living and that this way of earning an income was not particularly respected.¹ It appears that he has taken on this way of life as a choice, in order to live into the call to mission that God has laid upon him.

Theme: Walk the Talk

The Greek word *logos* (word) is a relative of the English word "logic," and has to do not only with God's words, but with God's whole way of reasoning, God's practical wisdom as it can be discerned over time. God's word can actually be observed at work among people, enabling them to live with embodied faith, courageous hope, self-offering love. In this final sentence we arrive at the wide frame in which Paul's labor and toil, his nursing and fathering, make sense: the plan of God, on the one hand inexpressible, but on the other hand observable in the lives of ordinary people who allow the word of God to be at work among them.

This short passage helps contemporary Christians move beyond the understanding of faith as an idea or a set of beliefs into the challenge of faith as a practice, a way of living in community with others. Paul describes the characteristics of ordinary people among whom God's word is clearly "at work": humility, honesty, willingness to work hard at tasks that do not command others' respect, willingness to share deeply of oneself, courage to take risks, all grounded in a foundation of complete trust in God.

Gospel Story as a Case Study (Matthew 23:1-12)

Jesus has been going hard at the Pharisees and other religious leaders. Today's text is Jesus's parting shot. In modern terms, Jesus says to his opponents: "you are all about you."

When Jesus is done skewering the self-righteous, he says to his audience, "Don't you be like that. Walk the talk." Jesus says "Be of service to others." If you truly want to be free of the burdens of ego, help someone else and you might forget all about yourself. And then you are free indeed. This is what saints do, they find freedom and fulfillment in service to others, they walk the talk. As Saint Francis said, "Preach the Gospel always. And if you have to, use words."