

October 1, 2023



Photo by Sr. Karin Nürnberg, CSJ, from the Abbey St. Hildegard in Eibingen, Germany

WORDS AND ACTIONS

By Sr. Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ

Excerpt from Today's Second Reading and Today's Gospel

Brothers and sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When

John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

MATTHEW 21:28-32

Reflection

The message in today's Gospel from Matthew is very clear; our words and actions must be congruent. Jesus gives the example of the two sons with one saying the "right" words and the other responding with the "wrong" words. Yet in the end, it is the son who answers incorrectly who allows his actions to drown out the incorrect response to his father -- because actions speak more loudly than the hollow words of the son who does not back up his words.

In the Second Reading from St. Paul to the Philippians, we hear "actionable" words: encouragement, participation, compassion, mercy, love, humility, and obedience. Just as in the Gospel, St. Paul is gently calling for alignment between one's words and one's actions. Our attitude toward life, other human beings, and creation itself flows from a humble, loving heart. We are being urged to nurture the same attitude and heart of Jesus so that we, too, follow the path of discipleship.

The Responsorial Psalm (25:4-9) is a beautiful prayer for us to ponder today. "Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior. Remember your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old. The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not; in your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord; thus, he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his ways."

I offer the following prayer from my own reflections of today's readings and Psalm 25.

Teach Me, O God

May I learn humility through the struggles and inconsistencies of life.

May I speak encouragement to those experiencing hardships at home, at work, or in the larger world.

May I be a participant and not a spectator in the fields of life in which I find myself.

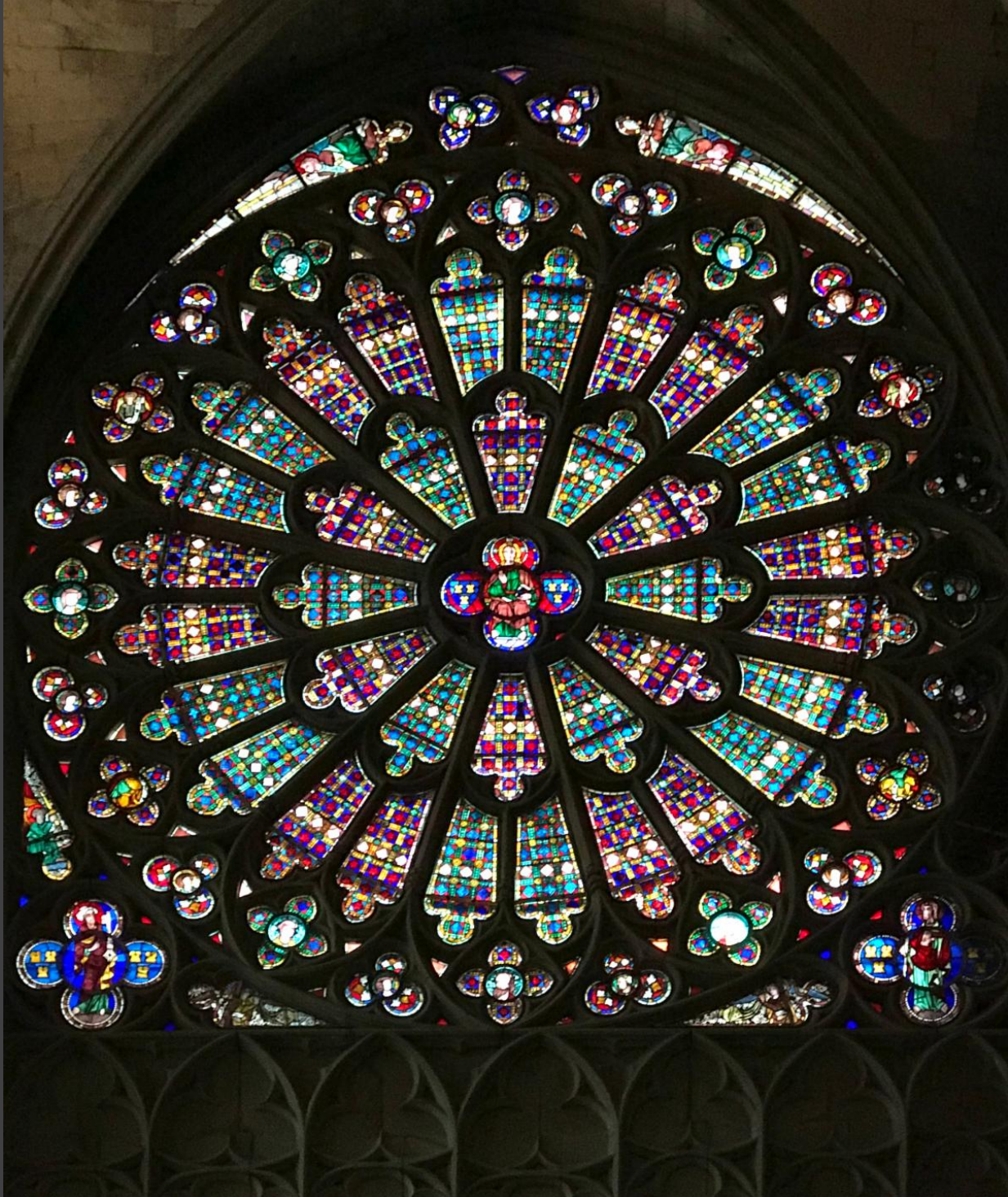
May compassion spring from the wellspring deep within me where God's indwelling presence finds a home.

May mercy be a part of my everyday relationships and encounters, as well as simply being present to others.

May obedience to the Spirit's movement in my life be welcomed, nurtured, and acted upon with generosity and courage.

And may love be the cornerstone of my life in Jesus Christ.

O God of mercy and compassion, help us be instruments of the peace you desire for all. May we humbly seek to imitate the life of Jesus even with our human limitations. Let us bring a joyful presence into a world caught in cycles of violence and neglect. May we embrace the call to be merciful, compassionate, and loving in the face of indifference, cruelty, and selfishness. Amen.



Lyon, France
Photo by Sr. Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ

For Pondering

- Which "actionable" word from today's readings captures your imagination? Why?
 - As your day unfolds, how might you "put on the mind and heart of Christ" in a tangible way?
-

For Prayer

*God of mercy and compassion,
we pray for the grace to be generous and loving as this day unfolds.
May our words align with our actions,
and may our actions flow from hearts transformed by the gift of your Son.
Amen.*

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