16.12.20

Read: Luke 7:19-23

Today we are reminded that actions speak louder than words, and that this is every bit as true in our relationship with God as it is in earthly matters. "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord', and not do what I tell you?", Jesus says to would-be followers (Luke 6:46).

John the Baptist sent his messengers from his prison cell, having greatly incurred the displeasure of Herod (and, of course, Herod's wife) by openly challenging Herod's highly irregular marital arrangement. Facing death, and having plenty of time to ponder things, John badly wants a firm answer to what is an extremely important question for him: is the man Jesus (John's cousin) truly the Christ, the one God promised would come, the one about whom John had said, when denying that he himself was the Christ, "he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie"  (Luke 3:15-17).

Jesus could have sent back the message 'yes', but of course anybody could say that. Rather than that, Jesus tells the messengers: "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear.....and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me". Jesus' miraculous actions in care for the poor and disadvantaged, forecast of the Messiah in the Old Testament, authenticate who he is. Actions speak louder than words, and words can be entirely hollow without the fruit of actions.

Those familiar with My Fair Lady will remember Eliza Doolittle singing in hair-tearing frustration to Freddie:

Words, words, words, I'm so sick of words,

I get words all day through, first from him (Prof Higgins) now from you; is that all you blighters can do?

Don't talk of stars burning above. If you're in love show me.

Don't talk of love, lasting through time. Make me no undying vow, show me now.

I hope nobody considers it blasphemous if I say that I can imagine the Lord sometimes singing similar words about us! Pious words and supplications and promises of undying fidelity to God can all have their place, but all our actions of every kind are what truly reveal our love for Him. And love does not start with great out-of-the-ordinary deeds, but with attending to His loving will in the ordinary matters of life, moment by moment, rather than choosing to go our own self-centred ways. Show me, show me now, he pleads.