THE SECOND READING

Lived faith

James bluntly states that Christian faith must show itself in deeds of service and justice. Because Paul insisted that faith alone is necessary for salvation (Romans 10:9), some people think that James contradicts Paul. In fact, the two apostles are in perfect agreement.

JAMES 2:14-18

Reading closely
1. How would you respond to the series of questions James poses in this passage?
2. Why might someone say “you have faith and I have works”?
3. What does James seem to mean by works?
4. How can faith be dead?
5. Can faith be demonstrated in ways other than works?
6. Why might James have written this?

Living the word
7. In what ways does faith seem better than works?
8. Why must faith be demonstrated through works?
9. How does this passage challenge you?

Paul uses the word “works” to refer specifically to the Jewish law. Now that Christ has come, salvation no longer comes through obedience to these laws but through faith in Christ. People can’t earn or “work” for salvation because eternal life is a gift God offers everyone, which we accept in faith (Romans 3:21-30).

Works

Like James, Paul insists that we demonstrate our faith in how we live. Paul repeatedly urges members of the Christian community to live justly and morally (Romans 12, 2 Corinthians 8, Galatians 5:13–6:10, Ephesians 4:25f, 1 Timothy 6:17f, and so on).

Moreover, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated in his own ministry that faith entails action on behalf of others. Genuine love for God and neighbor includes caring for people’s physical needs.

Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.
MARK 8:27-35

Reading closely
1. What responses might Jesus expect when he asks his disciples who people think he is?
2. What all might the disciples be thinking after Jesus asks them who they think he is?
3. What precisely to you think Peter believes about Jesus?
4. Do you think the other disciples agree with Peter?
5. How do you think the disciples react to what Jesus says will happen to him?
6. Why do you think Peter pulls Jesus aside?
7. How do you think Peter feels when Jesus calls him Satan?
8. What are differences between how God and human beings think?
9. How might people have reacted to what Jesus says about following him and losing their lives?

Living the word
10. In what ways have people given up their lives for Jesus and the gospel?
11. How are you trying to save your life?

THE GOSPEL READING

Along the way
Jesus’ actions and teaching have compelled people to ask who he is. Now he raises this question while traveling along the way. The way is a metaphor for Christian discipleship. As Jesus journeys to his own death, he further reveals who he is and teaches people what following his way requires of them.

Who is he?
The disciples sum up the different ideas people have about Jesus’ identity.
• maybe Jesus is a sort of reincarnation of John the Baptist
• some believed Elijah would precede God’s own arrival (Malachi 3:23)
• Jesus is like the prophets of Israel’s past who called people back to God

In each of these cases, people believe that Jesus is someone who prepares them for God’s arrival. No one, including the disciples, have yet realized that God has come in the person of Jesus himself.

Messiah/Christ
Messiah is the Hebrew word for anointed one. Christ is the Greek word for the same thing. In the ancient world people were anointed as a sign that they were chosen for a particular mission or role. Although Jews had different ideas about who the messiah would be and what he would do, no one expected the messiah to suffer and be killed.

Secret identity
Although Jesus is the messiah, the title that best expresses his identity is Son of God (15:39). Because nothing in the Jewish tradition anticipates the arrival of God’s own Son, Jesus needs time to guide his followers to this understanding. Until they have a clearer idea of his identity, he commands them not to declare who they think he is (v.30).

Jesus uses the title Son of Man to guide people to the truth of his identity. Although the title can refer simply to a human being, it also refers to the one who reigns over God’s kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14).

Rebukes
Each time Jesus speaks about his forthcoming suffering, his disciples reject or don’t understand what he means. Peter is so upset that he rebukes Jesus. The word rebuke describes how Jesus expels demons. Jesus thus rebukes Peter for acting like Satan, who violently opposes God’s reign.

Although Peter called Jesus the Messiah, he rejects the way of this Messiah. True followers of Jesus accept the suffering that comes from their commitment to the gospel. By devoting their lives to Jesus now, they become part of his eternal reign.

PRAYER
by St. Ignatius of Loyola
Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.

IGNORANCE OF SCRIPTURE IS IGNORANCE OF CHRIST –ST. JEROME