

*Nemo dat quod non habet* is a Latin phrase meaning “no one can give what they do not have.” It is a legal term in Property Law often applied in cases of stolen property. What it means is that a thief who sells stolen property to an innocent party never had legal title to the property, and therefore an innocent purchaser, despite his good will, does not own it.

Further legal difficulties arise over time when a string of innocent individuals have bought and sold something that was originally stolen. And there are all sorts of legal exceptions and further regulations that are applied by courts in an attempt to make things as right as possible.

In a more common parlance, this rule is often rendered as “you can’t give what you don’t have.” And is applied to parents and teachers. How can someone teach a child to love if they are a hateful person? Or teach a child to be Christ-like, if they’re running with the devil?

In today’s readings, we hear a progression of Scripture passages dealing with God’s Law in both the Old and New Testament.

The Old Law, while providing a strict framework for living, did not convey grace. St. Paul’s letter to the Romans treats this topic with amazing detail. The difficulty for Israel is that although God’s presence remained in their midst in the Ark of the Covenant, God’s presence remained in that box, and was not imparted to their hearts. Too often, they ignored the Law or worse, abandoned God’s Law to follow strange gods and sinful ways.

As a solution, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ time had added onto God’s Law all sorts of extra rules and regulations. These were seen as a series of ‘fences’ around the Law ... layers of protection that would better help them to keep God’s Law. Obey all of these rules, and you’ll never have to worry about breaking God’s Law. Yet, none of these rules conveyed any grace, either.

The scribes and Pharisees confront Jesus, not because His disciples were breaking God’s Law, but because they weren’t following the extra rules and regulations that were supposed to ensure that a pious Jew would keep far away from even the possibility of breaking God’s Law.

Jesus points out that it is fruitless to add on external practices if there is no conversion of heart. Dirty hands are nothing compared to a corrupted heart or a filthy mind or a wicked spirit. And washing your hands cannot change your heart, or your mind, or your soul.

In the Epistle, St. James confronts a new problem that had arisen in the Christian community in his day, and exists to this day in all Christian communities. Through Baptism, all Christians have received God's saving grace ... and the supernatural gifts of Faith, Hope, and Love.

But what good is God's grace within us, if we refuse to engage it? Or as St. James says it:

*Be doers of the word and not hearers only.*

Despite having God's grace, too often we resort to worldly solutions. We refuse to love ... refuse to forgive ... refuse to repent. We abandon faith, and lose hope ... and ignore God's Word in our daily lives.

St. James calls this a delusion. Because, in fact, we do have the ability to overcome all life's difficulties with the power of God's grace. We do hear and read God's Word and all have received God's abundant grace. Yet we choose not to use it, we choose not to share it with those in need, and we refuse to give God true authority over our lives. We have the power, but we put God in a box, and pretend He doesn't exist.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us make a firm choice to engage the graces we will receive today in everything that we say and everything that we do. As we make our profession of Faith, let us surrender the delusion, and recognize the power we have in the graces of Baptism, and the powerful effect that they can have on our lives and in the world.

Let us "*humbly welcome [God's] word that has been planted in [us]*" and engaging the powerful God-given graces we have received that are "*able to save [our] souls*" and the souls of the whole world, let us go forth from this place confirmed in the power of the Holy Spirit as true disciples of Jesus Christ to radically live out the Word of God in our daily lives.