

Saying and Doing

We have been told since childhood that actions speak louder than words. What we actually do is more important than what we may say we will do. We might talk a good talk, but it doesn't matter unless we walk a good walk.

And indeed, we find that to be true in today's gospel message. It takes place in a vineyard. The owner has two sons. Both sons were asked by their father to go out and work in the vineyard. Neither son really wanted to go out to work in the vineyard. The first son said: "I will not" but did. The second said: "Yes, sir," but did not.

Jesus sees the first son like the tax collectors and prostitutes that changed their minds and their lives after hearing Jesus and John the Baptist who preached the way of righteousness. This son, after thinking about what was right, changed his mind and went to the vineyards to work.

Jesus sees the second son like the chief priests and elders of the people who did not change their minds or lives. They talk righteously, but do not act righteously.

Actions speak louder than words.

Today is the beginning of Mental Illness Awareness Week. The National Catholic Partnership on Disability hopes that we can turn all the words about mental illness we hear this week into actions.

The question is: will we understand what we are hearing and just say we really should do something more to help people with a mental illness? Or will we turn our awareness into action and advocacy?

People with mental illness, and their families, face ongoing stigma from a large part of the population. Will we have our minds and institutions changed? Will we actually fight stigma in ourselves and others? Actions speak louder than words.

Will we take time to learn about inclusive language, about how our words make a difference? There is a huge difference in saying “John is a schizophrenic” and “John has schizophrenia.” John is a person. He is not a disease.

Mental illness is not accorded the same stature as other illnesses. There are far fewer hospital beds available. There is far less insurance coverage. And consequently there are many people that do not have adequate treatment available. Some that have none. Will we advocate for health care parity? Will we take time to tell our legislators and insurance companies to treat mental illness like any other illness?

Do you know that one out of every 5 families has a loved one dealing with a significant mental illness? So twenty percent of us here today are in need of the love, understanding, help, and advocacy of others.

I am always surprised when asked: Aren't you afraid of someone with mental illness? It is far more likely that a person with a mental illness will be a victim rather than a perpetrator of crime or violence. Most people with a mental illness are well educated and very capable. This illness/disease of the brain, though, keeps many people from being able to sustain success in school or work.

Remember when I said one can talk the talk? Well the action part is to walk the walk. And that is just what Jesus did for us. As Paul said to the Phillipians, Jesus came to us in human likeness, emptied himself and humbled himself so that he could walk with us, be with us. And he walked the walk as he healed our many needs. But he had a special affection for people who are sick and marginalized.

Being sick and marginalized is a perfect description of a person with mental illness. The illness, mental illness, can be as fatal as cancer. Mental illness cannot be cured, just treated as in diabetes. It is a chronic illness. And it comes with stigma.

Do you realize that with the stigma related to mental illness, many people, many families, find it difficult to come forward, difficult to ask for help or accept help.

Deacon James Decker
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If we could put ourselves in the shoes of person with a mental illness or with a family member and walk with them in their footsteps with love, compassion, and mercy, we will end stigma and likely ease other issues as well.

The National Catholic Partnership on Disability will host a prayer service on Tuesday, the 3rd of October. Information about how to be a part of this service can be found at www.NCPD.org.

We may become aware of the pressing needs of people with a mental illness and the lack of understanding of this disease. But hopefully this week will not be just about words. Hopefully we can turn the words we hear and speak into action.