

Ps 116 Tape

St. Matthew 13³¹⁻³⁵

PRAYERS

Listen now and pray with the words of Ps 1 - a psalm which contrasts the way of ~~the~~ ^{following God's law} with that of wicked men, and praises the law given by God for human happiness.

Ps 1

Did the reading from St Matthew at the beginning of our prayer today sound, vaguely, familiar? Where and when did you last hear that read? Can you remember? Well, you should have heard it at Mass only last Sunday, four days ago. Did it make any real impact on you then? Can you remember anything of the homily on those words, now?

It's a strange phenomenon how little attention most people pay, despite their best efforts, to the Word of God read every Sunday at Mass. It seems just to go in one ear (if even that, sometimes) and out the other. Ask almost any

Catholic, on a Monday, what the previous day's Gospel and homily were about, and he'll have trouble remembering, though other bits of Sunday's news will come easily to mind. Of course one can give all sorts of reasons why this is so; but I'd like to suggest that one ^{important} reason is that most of us just don't listen - or we hear all right, but we're not expecting to learn anything, to hear anything exciting or any personal message. We don't, somehow, expect God's word to change our lives, to have real, if any, practical effect on us. We're not, in other words, really open to the impact of God's ~~word~~ ^{message}, to the influence it could have on us - at least, not as much as we should be. Perhaps it's because we're afraid of what might be demanded of us if we did listen generously and with true poverty of spirit.

This goes not merely for our hearing of the Gospel at Mass, but especially for our reading of the Bible in general - how many of us Catholics ever do read prayerfully even just the 4 gospels? It's changing now, I think, but in general, for the past few centuries we've not had much of a tradition of intimate knowledge of the Bible gained from prayerful reading of it. In our homes, if we've had the Book of God's word at all, it hasn't been as much used or treated with as much

reverence as it has been by other Christians. In the Liturgy of the Latin rite, the gospel book has not had the respect and place of honour it has enjoyed in the Eastern rites, both Catholic and Orthodox. Of course the message of the word of God is far more important and worthy of respect than the material paper and print through which it is conveyed to us — so, the readiness of our hearts and minds to be open, to listen without prejudice or distraction, to be influenced, to expect God's word to pierce us like a two-edged sword and force us to recognise that our lives must be changed — this is of first importance. Nothing, perhaps, blocks our ears so effectively as comfortable recidity — we have faith, we keep the commandments, we know that our religion requires of us, we do our duty to God and man.

One family which decided they'd have to do something about knowing the gospels, and set aside a short period each Sunday to read a passage of scripture for their consideration during the week and ^{to} account for their ^{personal} reactions to it the following Sunday, found that after 6 months their lives had changed, been transformed by the word of God. That could happen to you too.

Prayer of S. Ephraem (before reading H. Script.)