

THE EMMAUS SERIES

9th Sunday Year A

Deuteronomy 11: 18, 26-28, 32

Romans 3: 21-25, 28

Matthew 7: 21-27

Not those who say, 'Lord, Lord', but those who do the will of my Father

Matthew's gospel is constructed around five major teaching discourses of Jesus, in which the sayings of Jesus on fundamental themes are grouped together. Today's passage concludes the first and greatest of these discourses, the most famous text in all Christian literature, the 'Sermon on the Mount' – which presents the fundamental charter of the 'Kingdom' announced by Jesus, a way of shared life shaped by the ways of God. Matthew concludes each of these discourses with a call to action, putting the teaching of the Saviour into practice. As we might expect, the call to action which concludes the 'Sermon on the Mount' is a powerful one. In today's first reading we hear Moses calling old Israel to serve the Lord by observing the Law given on Mt Sinai with all their heart and soul. As the name given traditionally to the discourse we are concluding indicates, it is recognised that Matthew presents the teaching of Jesus on the hillside near the Sea of Galilee as the promulgation of the New Law brought by the Saviour, the fulfilment of all that was promised and foreshadowed in the Old Law. Now Jesus, the New Moses, concludes his charter by calling his followers to listen to '*these words of mine, and act on them*'; the New Moses is more than the spokesman of God, he is the Lawgiver himself, announcing a new *Torah* that is to shape the life of the New Israel.

As Jesus calls us to be his true followers by observing his New Law, his words have a chilling finality; he warns us that if our fidelity is only expressed in words – even if these be an abundance of prayers and devotions – he may not recognise us as his true followers. True following calls for practical expression coming from a generous heart that has learned the ways of God from him. Matthew, we know, is addressing Jewish converts familiar with life in Palestine; where the streams often dried up, leaving a sandy bank that would be tempting to a foolish home builder, only to become a raging torrent when heavy rains came; he spells out the full drama of the warning in the parable of Jesus. St John Chrysostom, commenting on this parable, told his people that the rains etc. stand for the painful trials we can all expect to face in our lives. Our Christian faith does not safeguard us from these trials, but makes it possible to come through them with new growth and new strengths, relying on Christ – the 'rock' on which our life is grounded. 'What could be happier than this kind of life?' asked John Chrysostom as he concluded his commentary. His words remind us that the 'Sermon on the mount' began with the Beatitudes as a description of true happiness.

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