

## 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

When you see a house with plenty of shoes, jandals, outside the front door, I would guess that most likely a Filipino family lives there. It is our tradition to not just keep the inside of the house clean and free from dirt, but as a sign of reverence for the home.

The same act in our gospel reading today, shaking off the dust, leaving the shoes, jandals behind, but have different background and purpose.

Today's gospel says, "If any place will not receive you, shake its dust from your feet in testimony against them." The historical background of this verse is that the ancient Jews always shook the dust from their sandals before entering the holy city of Jerusalem. It was a symbolic gesture of rejecting the values of the pagan world, which surrounded Jerusalem, and keeping them out of the temple and their faith.

We too are to free ourselves of the pagan values of the world around us. The image of shaking dust from one's feet is as familiar as it is graphic. We stomp our feet to shake off the dusts when we travel dusty roads in the summer. We wash away the mud clinging in our boots and working shoes before getting inside the house. The analogy is to clean our soul of the dust of unchristian values and not introduce them into our head, our heart, our home.

Unworthy values, like dust, often accumulate unnoticed. Only when we pause for a moment of quiet reflection, like running a finger across furniture, do we notice the buildup of unwanted dust. For faithful Christians such dust is usually not blatantly immoral conduct, but simply a loss of the awareness of God in our lives. Only when we clear away the dust of an over-busy life, like cleaning dirty eyeglasses, do we see again clearly the presence of God.

In our church entrance, we can find sole scrapers. It is a play on the word for the sole of your shoe and the immortal soul within you. As we need clean shoes to step on fine carpet, we need a clear conscience to enter a sacred place. We have similar customs today. Devout Catholics, when they enter church, bless themselves with holy water, genuflect, and kneel for a quiet moment. They are shaking the dust of daily life from their feet, cleaning their eyeglasses, so that their souls might see more clearly the presence of God.

Not all the dust in the world is bad. There is good rich soil as well as filthy mud. It would be wrong to characterize the world about us the enemy of our faith. God comes to us not only in a church pew, but also at a

workbench; not simply in our prayer book, but also in our checkbook; not just on religious holydays, but often on civil holidays.

We do not come to church to escape the evil of the world. Or even to find here a God who is not present elsewhere in our lives. We come to church to reflect on the many ways that God has already come to us in our daily life. We come to celebrate the moments of our lives that God has been present to us in our homes, our hearts, our heartaches. We come to church to daydream about God.

Unfortunately, not all the world around us is good. Some of the world we wonder through should not become a part of our life. A good conscience knows what does not belong. "So shake its dust from your feet in testimony against them."