

Be Holy As God is Holy – Love neighbor, even your enemy as, God loves them –
7th Sunday – Ordinary Time

Today our readings are very direct. We are to be holy as God is holy, to love as God loves, to love and care for our neighbor as God expects because He loved us first. We are reminded that through baptism, we are a holy people, a royal priesthood, a people set apart for God. We are called to conversion. Our conversion from our human heart to God's own heart. Jesus showed us through his human nature that this was possible and eternal life was possible through Christ's victory over death. The Second Vatican Council reminded all the faithful, clergy, religious and laity that we are called to holiness. Holiness is not an option just for a few! Every baptized person is called to holiness, which means to be a saint!

"The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples, regardless of their situation: 'You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). He Himself stands as the Author and Finisher of this holiness of life. He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might inspire them from within to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and strength (Mark 12:30) and that they might love one another as Christ loved them (John 13:34; 15:12)" (Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church 40).

The Lord himself commands us to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." While this is impossible if we depend on ourselves, it is possible if we depend on the grace that God desires to give to us. Holiness is the work of the Trinity and to actively seek to receive the gifts the Spirit desires to pour out on us. Growth in holiness means to become like Jesus – to know our true identity as the beloved daughters and sons of God, to live the virtues, to choose the good and avoid the evil, to love as Jesus loved. "To be perfect" means to be perfect in charity, loving God above all things and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

How are we doing in becoming perfect? What is holding us back? Possibly a hurt caused by a person we trusted? A misunderstanding? Believing that someone needs to take the blame? Thinking it is only about me and doesn't affect anyone else?

Our interactions with the Father and our acceptance of his love and forgiveness help us to grow in holiness. The more we turn to the Father and receive his love for us, the more we become like Jesus. We must have a true desire to grow in holiness, to receive the virtues, to surrender our lives as Jesus surrendered his life to the Father. We must have a true desire to grow in charity.

If we think that our actions only affect us individually, we must understand that they also affect the community, the body of Christ. Too often today, we justify sin, deny sin, or think of an evil as a good. We see this in the abuse of drugs and alcohol, in the lack of respect for others, in the gossip and talking behind the back of another person, in cheating to get ahead, in the holding of grudges, in the refusal to forgive, in treating women as objects, in the misuse of our sexuality, and in the taking of innocent human life.

The sacrament of reconciliation is essential for growth in holiness. One of the reasons today for a lack of holiness is that we do not celebrate the sacraments regularly. If we are truly serious about growing in holiness and

receiving the Father's love for us, we will go to Confession as frequently as once a month. The sacrament of reconciliation helps us to see our sins, to seek God's mercy, receive God's grace and experience his tender love for us.

Lent will soon be here which provides a special time for us to examine our lives in the light of the Father's love for us. Our true home is in the heart of the Father, and only in remembering that truth will we be able to recognize our sin, seek God's forgiveness, and grow in holiness.

As we grow in holiness we grow in charity. In receiving the Father's love for us we will learn to love our neighbor as God loves our neighbor. We will desire to exercise charity in our homes, workplaces, society and world. We will grow in the fruits, virtues, of the Holy Spirit, "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity" (Galatians 5:22-23). We will be willing to forgive as our Father forgives us (Matthew 6:14-15), and we will be merciful as the Father is merciful with us (Luke. 6:36). We will keep the commandments, live the beatitudes, and "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick and in prison, welcome the stranger" (Matthew 25:31-46).

This weekend we will receive your support for those in need through the black bag collection. Saturday night, we had the showing of "Fireproof" which portrays the challenges of married life and how through God's grace, love can be restored between a husband and wife who believed divorce was the only answer. In the coming weeks, Christian Experience Weekend for women and men will be offered as an opportunity to look at where we are in God's perfect plan for our lives and how we can grow in holiness.

Conversion and growth in holiness do not happen overnight. We can become overwhelmed and discouraged if we think we must have all of these signs of holiness. We must remember that every saint, except our Blessed Mother, was a sinner. Some were great sinners and others less. For most saints, it took many years to become holy, it was not achieved overnight definitely not without trials and failures. Perseverance was a must. And what every saint realized was that they were loved unconditionally by the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – that God was truly for them and desired only the good for them. Today, we too must recognize the same if we are to become saints. May each one of us respond to the call of Jesus and grow in holiness.

Catechism of the Catholic Church references:

Paragraphs 823 – 827; 2013 – 2015; 1997 – 1999; 1931 – 1933; 1693, 1825, 2262 – 2267; 2302 – 2303; 2844

Opportunities:

Reconciliation: The Unfolding Mystery of God's Mercy and Love – small faith sharing groups during Lent

Women's Christian Experience Weekend – March 4 – 6

Men's Christian Experience Weekend – March 11 – 13

15th Annual Catholic Men's Conference – April 16

Deacon Ron Smith

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