

Transformation to Love like God

Last Friday and Saturday, I celebrated Confirmation with nine students at St. Rose of Lima Parish in Torrington and with 19 students at St. James' Parish in Douglas. The homily for Saturday evening is below.

Can you teach me how to live in harmony with God in one commandment? In today's gospel (Mt. 22:34-40), that is what they asked Jesus: "***Which commandment is the greatest?***" The greatest commandment is the heart of the commandments. If you live that commandment, you will live all the commandments. You will live in harmony with God.

Jesus combined two commandments into one inseparable command: Love God and love like God. The second command "***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***" (Mt. 22:39) becomes in John's gospel "***Love one another as I have loved you***" (Jn. 13:34). Imitate how Jesus loves others. That's it folks! That is how the faithful Jew or a true disciple behaves. God's Love is the foundation of their lives. The proof is that they love like God.

The Holy Spirit is the key to loving God and loving like God. A story from my own life might help you to see how the Holy Spirit transforms us to love like God. When I was a seminarian Rome, my class held strong opinions. We were divided and talked with contempt about each other. That's right, seminarians can be uncharitable or judgmental. At one point, I realized how wrong it all was. Our unity as brothers in Christ was being wounded by our attitudes.

So, at Sunday Mass I decided to ask for the grace to stop thinking and talking about my classmates that way. I was sitting near the front of the chapel. As the others came forward to receive Communion, I prayed for the grace to be free of that judgmental attitude and to have a fraternal spirit toward everyone. I still remember the feeling of peace as I left Mass. I was free from the sense of bitterness, rancor, and division. The Holy Spirit filled me with the grace to be in communion with them. Not that we all started to think alike, but I had a sense of living with brothers. Communion with God helped me be in communion with them.

I did not accomplish it on my own, rather I was transformed by the Spirit. To do that, first I had to freely accept God's mercy despite my sins. Only if we humbly accept grace, can we be merciful toward others. Confirmation students: You cannot earn the grace of the Holy Spirit. Just open your hearts to the gift. Then by the grace of the Holy Spirit, you will love God and love like God.

Often during the Eucharistic Prayer, I pray for my own transformation. I pray for reconciliation with anyone whom I have offended, and for God's grace to transform my thinking and acting. It always makes a difference.

Each Eucharistic Prayer has a special prayer called the epiclesis. At the epiclesis, the priest calls down the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the second Eucharistic Prayer the priest says, "***O Lord, make holy these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.***"

Did you know that the Eucharistic Prayer also contains a petition to the Spirit so that the people would be transformed into the Body of Christ? The petition is to transform us in Communion, so that we will be united as the Body of Christ. In Eucharistic Prayer II the

priest says, ***“Humbly we pray that partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.”*** In Eucharistic Prayer III, he says, ***“Lord, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”***

As Catholics, our Eucharistic faith is more than a private love for Jesus; it enflames us to love others. Participation in Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, praying the rosary, and Reconciliation inspire communion with God and communion with our neighbor. These spiritual practices fill us with Jesus’ power to be kind and generous to others. As you are confirmed pray for the grace to love God and love like God. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you an instrument of Jesus’ peace and love. To be a witness who forgives like Christ.

This is an essential truth of the faith, that is, the Eucharist not only unites us with the Risen Lord Jesus, but also it unites us as the Body of Christ. To be Catholic is to live this important doctrine of the faith.

These days, selfish individualism is infecting the Body of Christ. It is a far more rampant virus than Covid-19. One symptom of the virus is the demand for my personal rights with no mention of personal responsibility for the common good of society. This is another Catholic doctrine. We are responsible for the common good. Some people complain about their personal rights, but they don’t complain that the doctrine of the common good is not being lived.

In Catholic teaching, rights and responsibilities go hand-in-hand. We promote the right to life, proper health care, personal property, etc. Yet, we declare that we are responsible to use God’s gifts for the good of others. Christians promote the common good.

You can hear God’s concern for the common good in the first reading (Ex. 22:20-26). The Lord said: ***“You shall not molest or oppress the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan.”*** God reminds us that we are responsible for the common good. We must be compassionate to the most vulnerable in society. In the time of Exodus, those people included: aliens or foreigners who have no rights where they are living; orphans and widows who in Israelite society were the neediest citizens; and the street person who owned nothing more than a cloak.

A commandment almost identical to this one is found in Leviticus. ***“If you have resident aliens in your country, you will not molest them. You will treat resident aliens as though they were native-born and love them as yourself – for you yourselves were once aliens in Egypt”*** (Lev. 19:32-33). In these passages, God reminded the people of their own plight as aliens in Egypt and how he rescued them. Basically, he told them: ***“Treat others according to the Lord’s mercy toward you.”*** Imitate God’s love toward you.

The first reading ends with the sentence: ***“If [the poor man] cries out to me, I will hear him. For I am compassionate!”*** In the Old Testament, this word for “*compassion*” typically describes a *special favor* shown to the weaker party by someone who is stronger. It denotes kindness bestowed on someone in dire need. It illustrates divine generosity and solicitude. It expresses the generosity of God.

Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, God gives you his Spirit with great generosity, even though you are sinners. Why? God blesses you with his Spirit so that you will love like God. The Saints whom you chose for Confirmation shined with God’s love for the poor. Their

communion with God could be seen in their communion with others and by their compassion for others.

Believe in the gift of the Spirit and be open to it. Tonight, the main way to pray is to simply ask God for the Holy Spirit with faith and to be receptive. Confirmation strengthens you with Jesus' love, so that you will love like him.