

Trinity II (9 June 2024)

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

+In the Name...

I feel like I am always reading statistics and the results of surveys. My first degree was in political science, and so during that time of my life I felt that it just came with the territory. But when I entered the Church world, or rather made it a bigger part of my life, I realized that clerics and those who write about the Church are every bit as interested in surveys and statistics and political scientists: is attendance up or down? Is giving up or

down? What if we divide it into different demographics? For as long as I can remember, and I suspect for as long as the mainline protestant churches in this country have been shrinking, the question has been why are people leaving or not joining in the first place? One suggestion I recently read in an article is that young people today (and probably by extension, people of any age who do not currently attend church) are put off by hypocrisy, or a lack of genuineness in both the laity and the members of the clergy who are found in churches. Instantly I thought of Bp. Connors's quip when someone offered to him the excuse of too many hypocrites in church, for why he or she did not attend. "Yes, there are some hypocrites at St. Mark's," the Bishop would reply. "But there is always room for one more!" As both entertaining AND accurate as his comment was, it does not address the very real problem that the majority of an entire generation views those of us who get up early on Sunday to worship (a verb they probably cannot even define) as going through these motions in the hopes

of gaining power, influence, control, or whatever, not because we are commanded to do so by Almighty God. Now, I realize that it is most difficult to convince someone who does not even believe in God that he needs to worship Him, but there is still a disconnect between what we do and those who are probably most in need of what we have to offer.

It likely will not surprise you that this is not the first time in history that someone in the Church has been accused of being a hypocrite. Earlier this week the Church celebrated the feast day of St. Norbert. Norbert lived in what we now know as Germany but in the late 11th century was part of the Holy Roman Empire. During his early life he pursued earthly pleasures in a life at court, and even took minor orders. He declined further promotions in the Church because he liked his courtly life and the luxuries it afforded him. Norbert truly had a St. Paul-type experience that changed his life: he was riding his horse and he got caught in a storm. A bolt of lightning scared his horse, resulting in Norbert

being thrown off his back. Sometime later he woke up, knowing that in gratitude for his life being spared he should do something worthwhile with it. Norbert decided to become a monk, and with all the gusto you might expect after having an experience like he did, he began preaching far and wide. Of course, Norbert did not set out to start his own religious order, but his self-discipline was so strict that he found the existing orders wanting. The result was that none of the Orders wanted him, especially when he tried to reform them into his ideal. In some cases, he was only trying to get the members to live according to their own Rule of Life, but when one cannot win on the merits of one's argument, one looks for distractions. Norbert's detractors complained that he did not have a license to preach and that he was a hypocrite because he still owned all his belongings from when he lived his life at court. Both criticisms were technically true, so he received a license from the Bishop and he gave away almost all of his possessions, save a

mule, a missal, some vestments, a chalice, a paten, and 40 pieces of silver.

Now I know what you are thinking: that's great Father, but I am not called to be a monk! Naturally, the vast majority of us are not called to be monks or nuns. Aside from the obvious problem this would cause for the future of the human race, most of us do not have the right disposition for it. And Norbert would be okay with that. He recognized that most of us are called to the married state. When he was approached by a nobleman who wanted to join Norbert's Order, the saint was frank with him and told him that he was not called to the religious life but to get married and have a family. We have been so bombarded with the news stories of nun and priest shortages for the last 30+ years, we forget that the lay vocation is just as important as a religious one. The important part is following God's plan for you, whether we are talking about the big picture, like one's life work, or on a smaller scale.

But I have gotten off track! The point is that we as Christians have to be genuine. Another feast we celebrated this week, and will commemorate at every Mass within its Octave is that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Now this feast has a reputation of being very Roman, and I admit that some of the artwork depicting the devotion can border on the schmaltzy. While the current iteration of the devotion came about just in the 17th century, it dates back 1,000 years and became popular during the Crusades, with the soldiers returning from the Holy Land where they had visited the place of the Crucifixion. While we know that our brain is the seat of our emotions, we still continue to give our heart credit for love. If you doubt me even for a moment, just walk into a Hallmark store during the first two weeks of February! All the devotion to the Sacred Heart is trying to foster is “God’s boundless and passionate love for mankind.” Even the Wesley brothers, the founders of the Methodist Movement and hardly remembered for

their Catholic sympathies, found the devotion helpful in their spiritual lives.

God's love for us is perfect because He is divine. Our love for Him falls short because we are inferior beings. But what we do with our lives outside of Sunday mornings is what shows how much we love God, both to Him and others. Of course, we do not do things for God to impress others, but if the only time we worship, pray, read the Bible, or think about God is on Sunday mornings, then perhaps we should re-examine our priorities.

So, you have homework this week: what can you do to show God that you love Him? It's not for His benefit; He already knows you love Him. And it really is not for the benefit of those who are looking for any excuse not to go to church. It is for your benefit. Think of it as an early Father's Day present for your Heavenly Father. Afterall, He already has everything else.

+In the Name...