

Trinity 7 Morning Prayer

First Lesson: Ecclesiasticus 6:5-17

⁵Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fair speaking tongue will increase kind greetings.

⁶Be in peace with many: nevertheless, have but one counsellor of a thousand.

⁷If thou wouldest get a friend, prove him first and be not hasty to credit him.

⁸For some man is a friend for his own occasion and will not abide in the day of thy trouble.

⁹And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity, and strife will discover thy reproach.

¹⁰Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction.

¹¹But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself and will be bold over thy servants.

¹²If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face.

¹³Separate thyself from thine enemies and take heed of thy friends.

¹⁴A faithful friend is a strong defense: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure.

¹⁵Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable.

¹⁶A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him.

¹⁷Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright: for as he is, so shall his neighbour be also.

Second Lesson: John 15:12-27

¹² This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

¹³ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

¹⁴ Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

¹⁵ Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

¹⁶ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

¹⁷ These things I command you, that ye love one another.

¹⁸ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

¹⁹ If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

²¹ But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

²² If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.

²³ He that hateth me hateth my Father also.

²⁴ If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

²⁵ But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

²⁶ But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

²⁷ And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

Introduction

Maximilian Kolbe was born in 1894 in Wola, Poland. In a vision of the Virgin Mary at the age of 12, he was told he had to choose between one of two crowns: the white one would see him “persevere in purity,” while the red crown would see him die as a martyr. Both ended up being his destiny.

Kolbe dedicated his life to serving Christ and his fellow man. After becoming a Catholic monk at age 16 and undergoing a lengthy tutelage in Rome to be ordained as a priest, he returned to his native Poland. He opened a friary outside Warsaw in 1919. When the Nazis invaded in 1939, he not only housed, clothed, and fed Jewish refugees but sacrificed himself to spare one from execution.

Kolbe’s answer to his vision was a promise to serve others, live righteously and die for a moral cause if necessary. Fulfillment of those vows became harrowingly available after Germany’s invasion. Kolbe selflessly used his friary to shelter the persecuted and publicly denounced the evil of the Nazis in an illegal 1941 radio broadcast and in a magazine.

Arrested and sent to Auschwitz as a result, Kolbe not only shared his meager rations with fellow prisoners but regularly wandered the barracks at night to console those in despair. His true test came in July 1941, after prisoner Franciszek Gajowniczek (Gajowicheck) made a failed attempt to escape and his Nazi captors prepared to execute him.

Gajowniczek (Gajowicheck) begged for mercy in hopes of one day seeing his wife and children again. Unable to ignore his suffering, Kolbe stepped in and volunteered to die in his place. While he rationalized it by explaining that he was older and did not have a family, Kolbe knew he was merely keeping a childhood promise to God.

The Nazis surprisingly agreed to the idea and threw Kolbe into a bunker to die with 10 others who were accused of being part of the escape attempt. Many of the prisoners tried desperate measures to stave off dehydration and survive. According to reports, Kolbe never wavered and spent his time singing songs and leading prayers.

When the Nazis opened the bunker three weeks later, only Kolbe was still alive. The Nazis still executed him, and he died a martyr, sacrificing himself, selflessly serving others and “persevering in purity.”¹

Body

In our second lesson for today, Jesus tells his disciples,

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

Last week, Father Chris talked about repentance, belief and baptism as the general formula for Salvation found in Holy Scripture. Regarding belief, he stated “action must accompany belief, faith must work through love.” As we consider our Lord’s command to love one another, especially through examples of saints like Maximilian Kolbe, we recognize the truth that Jesus is not speaking about the type of love we normally consider. There may be great feeling in your love for others, but the kind of love which Jesus speaks of here is not based on feelings or emotions.

Christian pastor and author Charles Swindoll describes it this way:

“The Greek word here is not the fickle *eros*, or even the heartfelt *philia*, but *agape*. *Agape* often involves deep feeling, but it begins with a decision. *Agape* does not consider merit and does not wait for inspiration. *Agape* is the kind of love exemplified by God, especially in relationship with His Son. Moreover, the tense of the verb is present, which suggests repeated or ongoing action: “keep loving one another.” The quality of that love must be the same kind as the love we receive from Christ. He is our example and our standard.”²

It all comes down to a decision we all must make. This is love that is based on a decision to obey and a decision to not only accept Jesus as our Savior, but to humbly submit to Him as our Lord. It can be really hard sometimes to love our neighbors and the people we see in our everyday life. If one uses human rationalization or excuse making, it gets even harder.

¹ Marco Margaritoff, "The Awe-Inspiring Stories Of Nine Heroes Who Sacrificed Themselves To Save Others." AllThatsInteresting.com, August 11, 2022

² Charles R Swindoll, *Insights on John* (Zondervan). 2010, 243.

A Christian might think of it this way, “I’ll love that person, as unlovable as they are at times, based not on my feelings but based on my love for Christ and a desire to please Him and obey Him.”

Jesus commands us to “love one another as I have loved you.” When we make the decision to obey what Jesus commanded, it becomes a little easier to understand. I am going to keep loving that person. Just as Christ has loved me, and keeps loving me, in spite of myself. None of us are always lovable, and all of us continue to sin against God. The key is to continue to love one another by the grace of God, like Jesus loves me.

This kind of love is self-sacrificing.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Though at the time, the disciples do not see this, certainly Jesus has in mind here the kind of love He is about to demonstrate when He is crucified. There is no greater demonstration of love than the sacrifice of Christ for sinners.

This example of Christ’s love has filled the hearts of many men and women in history who have freely given their lives to save others. The example of Maximilian Kolbe is just one of many inspiring stories of people whose actions were in harmony with their beliefs and their obedience to what Jesus commanded.

This kind of love is shaped by obedience.

Jesus says...

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

Once again, we come back to deciding to follow and obey Christ. Our obedience gives evidence that we are a friend of Christ, and our obedience gives evidence that we belong to Christ and that we are committed to fulfilling what He taught us.

We love one another not because it is easy, but because we are Christ’s, and we want to obey and honor Him in all we do. You love one another because you have made the mission of Christ as your own mission. You love others because you want to please your Savior and it is what you have been commanded to do. Jesus tells us in Matthew that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all of our heart, soul and mind. Second to this is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:37-40) These two statements go hand in hand with our lesson from today. You

are my friends if you do what I command you, and the greatest commandment is love. Our love for God leads us to obedience, which leads us to love one another.

This kind of love is also strengthened through fellowship with Christ.

Note in verse 15 that the wisdom of God is made known to those who are of Christ.

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

We are not servants who are kept in the dark. We are friends to whom God has revealed the truths of His kingdom. When we come to church, when we read God’s Word, and do so with faith, God opens our hearts and minds to understand the truth. God does so through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As we navigate life, we need the Spirit of God, and those truths God has revealed, shaping our hearts and minds. Through this process we can learn to love one another in obedience to the command of Christ.

Action

Learning to love others as Christ commands us to do is not easy. However, one only needs to look toward scripture as our guide, and to God as the One who provides the grace to achieve his high call.

Forgive Others

When it comes to loving others, forgiveness is essential, as over time everyone will do or say something that is wrong or sinful. The Bible has much to say about forgiving those who wrong us. As Ephesians 4:32 states, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.”*

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father also will forgive you” (Matt. 6:4).

Forgiveness allows relationships to heal, for us to let go of hate and anger, and makes way for restored fellowship with God and each other.

Overlook Minor Offenses

No one is perfect, so minor issues are bound to come up in relationships from time to time. According to Proverbs 19:11, *“Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.”*

Rather than stew over petty grievances or issues, we can choose to let them go and maintain harmony. We can be sensible!

Forgive Major Offenses

When someone harms us or we are the victims of their sins, forgiveness often seems impossible. We know that holding onto bitterness and anger only harms us, not the offender. Jesus set the supreme example of forgiveness when He prayed for those who spit on Him, mocked Him and crucified Him.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Forgive Others As God Has Forgiven You

It is important to understand and recognize that God’s forgiveness towards us is complete and unconditional. He does not hold our past mistakes over us but removes our transgressions. *“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us”* (Psalm 103:11-12). *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will forgive you”* (Matt. 6:14)

As Mark 11:25 states, *“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins”*.

By freely forgiving others we honor God and live our lives in the manner He has instructed us to do.

Serve Others With Grace and Humility

One way to love one another is to serve others with humility and grace. We should serve cheerfully and willingly, not out of mere obligation but with a sense of alacrity (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Jesus provided the perfect example of humble service by washing His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). When serving, we must guard against selfish pride and conceit and truly count others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

We should serve with a sense of total acceptance, not judging who is deserving of help or limiting our outreach to people that we have things in common with. As Jesus tells us in Luke 14:13-14, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Conclusion

It is not about our mission or desires on earth, it is about His mission.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

Once we are followers of Christ, we know we have been chosen for the purpose of fruit bearing and sharing the Gospel with others. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) and as Christians we must live our life as a testament to that love.

This is also what followers of Christ are to be about. We are to live in and abide in His mission and ministry. We are to be about living in such a way that glorifies God. Jesus says the way in which we are to live is to be defined by our love for one another. This love is action and purpose. We need to work to learn how to love each other as Christ loved us.

As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13:1, with this sobering truth, that we may speak with the “tongues of men and of angels”. We may be able to share the Gospel in wonderful and charismatic ways, and we may say all the important things that we need to say but if we have not love, the intentional and sacrificial kind of love Christ taught us, and Maximilian Kolbe and the saints demonstrated for us, then we are just “noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.” May we all strive to love intentionally as Christ loves us.

To the Only Wise God, Our Savior. Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen