

## Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary time 2019

My beloved brothers and sisters, Jesus is not telling us to hate our parents in order to love God. In the culture of Jesus, to love and hate meant to declare your loyalty. Jesus is telling us that our first loyalty in life must be for God. Our first fidelity in life must be to God, because it is He who created us, and only when my fidelity to God is first, will I have a right relationship with my family and everyone else in my life. Unless my first fidelity and loyalty is centered first upon God, I will always make myself first in my life and everyone else and everything else will be way down on my list. That is why as faith and religious life have diminished in this country and in the West, immorality and violence have increased! We cause a moral vacuum, and nature hates a vacuum, and so it becomes filled with evil!

Jesus has created for love and in love; and therefore, he wants us to have the fullness of love and in that fullness of loving according to the plan and creation of God, we find true fulfillment and true happiness; nothing else can take its place! Jesus has created us to be great saints; but we must cooperate with His Divine Plan for us. Thus we are called to the deepest loyalty to Him, and that means walking in His footsteps; and that means the way of the cross, the way of self-denial. Jesus did not say to His first disciples, Peter, James and John: "Oh, you can continue being good fishermen." He said to them: "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men!" He said to them and to us: "If you want to be my follower, you must take up your cross and follow me!" Remember, great crowds were following Jesus, but only a small group decided to become His disciples

The Gospel for today is not a license to hate anyone! It is a call to Love God first in our lives, in order to love rightly our brothers and sisters in the world! If we value our own life and our own comfort in the world, more than we love Him, we will never be able to truly love like Him, and we will never have His joy and friendship. This call to first and foremost fidelity to God, to Jesus, is actually a call to love others more, not less. It is a call to kiss the leper in others, because I see the leper in myself, and I come to Jesus to be healed of my leprosy. Anyone who has seen Mother Theresa of Calcutta holding a sick and dying child or person knows that this is true. The saints are those who love God above all things, and

because they love Him above all things, they love others with that same love. The conversion moment for St. Francis of Assisi was the moment when he saw the leper, which utterly disgusted him, and he made the decision to go up and embrace him and then gave him his own robes. When he did so, all of a sudden, he realized he was embracing Christ! It is in Christ wherein the abyss of my misery meets the infinite abyss of the ocean of God's mercy and love; and in Him, I become a vessel of that love pouring out for others! When I surrender myself to Him and His way, I fall into the abyss of His Divine Love, and I become Divine Love- that is heaven on earth!

This is the meaning of the Eucharist! That is the meaning of the self-giving of Jesus in His true Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity handed over to us in the mystery of the Eucharist! First, He gives Himself to us in the mystery of the Cross; then, He gives Himself to us in the Mystery of His Body and Blood as food for eternal life; then, He says to us: "The Mass is ended; now you go and do the same!"