

I. Homily – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Peter’s Profession of faith

II. As a priest, I have the privilege of working with engaged couples as they prepare for their marriage.

III. During the first meeting that the priest has with a couple preparing for their marriage, there is a specific interview that is conducted and a questionnaire.

A. One of the questions that is asked is about Mass attendance.

B. It is quite common that the response is something like this: “Well, I know that we really need to get to Mass more often.”

C. And, my question to them is, why? Why do you need to get to Mass more often?

D. Your life is going along just fine without it so why do you need Mass?

E. Now, I know that I am letting out one of my secrets here, but my intention is not to convince them that they do not need to come to Mass.

F. But, it is a good question for us to contemplate and even answer because it is one of the most common questions I field.

1. Granted that it is not usually phrased this way. A person rarely comes up to me and asks, “Why do I need to come to Mass?”

2. Usually, it is phrased like the statement of some of those engaged couples:

a) “I know we should go to Mass more often.” Is actually saying, I feel guilty about it but I am not really sure why.

b) I might also hear the phrase: “Mass is boring” or “We had to go shopping” or “we had a game.”

c) These are all ways of asking the question: “Why do I really need to go to Mass? Or why is Mass important?”

d) Quite often the concern comes from someone other than the individual who is not going to church, for example, a parent or grandparent: “My children are all married and none of them is attending Mass anymore.” Or “my grandchildren are not yet baptized.”

e) These are all different forms or circumstances in which the question about the import of the Mass is manifested.

f) There are still others:

(1) One manifestation of the question is an instruction to the priest: “Keep it short Father, I have to get home for the game.”

(2) This is another way of asking that question: “Why is Mass important?”

3. Yet, this question about the import of the Mass is asked in the passage we just read from the gospel of Matthew.

IV. “Who do people say that I am?”

A. We come to this question of our Lord to His apostles.

1. The first question he asks is what everyone else is saying.
2. “Moses, Elijah or one of the prophets.”
3. You notice that these “other people” realize that there is something different and special about Jesus Christ, but they are not quite getting what it is.

B. Then, our Lord gets more personal and asks those who know and love him the best: “Who do you say that I am?”

1. St. Peter pipes up: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”
2. Peter does waffle a bit throughout this life. At times, he is fervent and, at other times, he is lukewarm or fearful. Ultimately, however, St. Peter gives his life.

V. I have a friend... who recently celebrated his wedding anniversary; however, he was gone on a business trip the day of the anniversary itself. So, he sent flowers to his wife and he made sure to phone her...but she was still kind of upset... So he asked her why she was still upset and she responded, "I did not want flowers and I did not want a phone call. I wanted you."

VI. My friends, the biggest reason that people do not come to Church is not because of the music...not because of the teachings of the Church...not because of the priest scandal...not because of the boring homilies...

VII. The reason that people do not come to Church is that they do not know who it is that is standing there before them and giving himself to us at the altar.

A. We hear the words, "This is my body and this is my blood," but we either do not believe them or we do not let others know that Mass is all about fostering a relationship of love with Christ.

B. We cannot phone in this relationship.

C. And we cannot even send flowers.

D. There are levels of relationship between persons...if we picture this hierarchy of relationship as a pyramid (of course, remembering that each level might overlap and supercede other levels at times), we can start to see better where our relationship with God fits:

1. There is the acquaintance. The person that you have just met.
2. There are co-workers or employers and employees and these co-workers may sometimes also become friends and confidants.
3. There are buddies with whom you enjoy some level of comraderie attending events together.
4. Then, there are real friends that you trust and rely on and who relies on you.

5. There is the relationship that you have with your siblings and cousins.
6. There is also the relationship you have with your mother and father.
7. Then, there is your spouse. The person to whom you have promised your whole life and with whom you share your life.
8. Where does your relationship with God fit?
 - a) *Is he an acquaintance, a buddy, a co-worker, a friend or a spouse?*
 - b) *Actually, God fits in the category of intimacy which goes beyond that of spouse.*
 - c) *When God tells us that he wants us, he wants us even more intimately than the way my friend's wife said she wanted her husband on their anniversary.*
9. Your relationship with God is the relationship with the God who made you and desires that you be united with Him for all eternity.

E. If we truly want Christ, then there is only one place to get Him. If we realize that Christ wants us, then there is no better place to give ourselves to Him.

F. We may fulfill an obligation by coming to Church on Sunday. We may avoid committing a mortal sin by coming to Church on Sunday, but why is coming to Mass so important?

G. Although we do learn about God at Mass and this is very important, Mass is not just about learning.

H. Because here at this altar we encounter Jesus Christ who gives Himself to us completely and we cannot encounter Him in this way any place else.

VIII. Knowing and loving

A. Loving is actually a cycle of knowing and loving.

B. In order to love someone, we must first know them.

C. If we love them, we desire to know more about them so that we might love them more completely.

D. Further, love is an act of the will. This means that it is a decision.

1. Our culture has typically defined love as an emotion.
2. Love is that tingly feeling we get when we are in the room with the person we love.
3. But, this is not love. This is infatuation.
4. Love is a decision. Whether we realize it or not, we decide to love someone.
5. The man who is in love with his wife puts his own life in danger to save her not because he enjoys running into a burning building. He did not get a tingly feeling about how much he would enjoy smoke inhalation.
6. He runs into the burning building to save his wife, because he has freely chosen to love her to death.
7. Although her physical beauty may have first attracted him, he did not begin to love her until he really came to know her.

E. This is the same with God.

1. If our relationship with God is still at tingly feeling stage, then we have not yet moved to love.
2. We decide that we are going to cultivate our relationship with him by a conscious decision.
3. I will read the Bible each day. I will go to Mass on Sunday. I will receive Holy Communion. I will spend an hour in the adoration chapel. I will act with virtue toward those who do not love me. I will donate my time to help the poor.
4. Although they may have the added effect of making me feel better about myself, there are going to be days when I don't feel like it. If it is an act of love, then this act of the will occurs even when I don't feel tingly. In fact, this is the purest act of love. The one that lunges forward without concern for self.

IX. Conclusion

- A. So, our Lord asks us, "Who do you say that I am?"
- B. Am I an acquaintance?

- C. A buddy?
- D. A friend?
- E. A parent?
- F. A spouse?
- G. Or the one who goes beyond spouse...the Christ, the Son of the Living God who saves us from our selfishness and pride by giving his very life to us?
- H. "Who do you say that I am?"