

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Year A / June 28, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

There is no doubt that the Corona Virus epidemic is having a profound effect on the entire world and on virtually every human being. We have all had to deal with it to one degree or another and it has changed so much of what we do and how we deal with one another. I could list the changes but I don't need to do that. You are as well aware of them as I am. And there may be more yet to come. Let me just say that the changes have been so widespread that I believe the epidemic will be one of those moments in history that becomes a common reference point. Things will be designated as either "Pre-Covid" and then, later, as "After Covid".

What remains to be seen is how different the "After Covid" life will actually be in the long run. Will we have to wear masks in the grocery store for the rest of our lives? Will we never shake hands with people again? Will children never go to an actual classroom in the future? Will all people always meet over the computer instead of in person? I think the answer to all of these things and many others is 'no'. There is no doubt that some effects of the Corona Virus will be lasting, I believe that many of them will not be. We had a life we knew before all this started and we want to go back to it and with good reason.

This new Covid life is more restrictive. It is a diminished life compared to what we were living before the epidemic. So, it is natural that we should want to go back to our previous way of life. Now, there is another part of our lives that can be marked with a before and after. It is our baptism. Before baptism was one life and after baptism there is a completely new one. This is what Saint Paul is trying to get across to the Christians at Rome when he wrote to them saying: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? As to his death, he died to sin once for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus." It is hard to describe a more complete before and after separation than that; than saying what you have died to one way of life, a way of life without Christ, and now you live a new life with him, because you were baptized. For every Christian there should therefore be a consciousness of life before Christ and life with Christ, right? Admittedly this is a challenge because so many of us were baptized at the beginning of our lives. So, having this radical experience of separating life before Christ and life with Christ is something we will never have. But that doesn't matter for a couple of reasons. First of all, we

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know what a fully Christian life looks like. Yes, we actually do. We see a fully Christian life revealed in the life of Jesus Christ and we can see the goodness in his life. In Jesus' life we see strength, charity, generosity, righteousness, piety, devotion, wisdom, understanding, humility, compassion, courage, and self-sacrifice, all lived out in an actual human life and all on display in actual human situations. There is nothing in Jesus we would not want to be ourselves. We should all want to know the goodness of such a life where sins, large and small, have no place because the love of God and neighbor is too strong for them.

The truth is, that at baptism, that's the life we are supposed to begin even if we don't remember one without him. We shouldn't want any other kind of life because it will be a lesser life. And that brings us to the second reason it doesn't matter if we remember a life before being baptized in Christ Jesus or not.

Being Christian is a choice. Even with baptism it is always a choice to believe in Jesus Christ and follow him as a disciple because you believe that he died for you on the cross and you believe that where he will take you is where you want to go as human being, to who and what you want to be. Being Christian is a choice to consciously apply the words and teachings of Jesus to your life, to build your house upon them as your moral foundation. Being Christian is choosing to pray, as Jesus chose to pray. Being Christian is a choice to act with compassion, extend mercy, foster peace, encourage others, and even to pick up a cross and carry it. Being a Christian is to seek first the Kingdom of God. Being a Christian starts one day, yes, but it is also a choice that is made every day and strengthened here each week at the Lord's supper. Being Christian is not so much believing that Jesus loves you. We know that. Being Christian is choosing to love Jesus.