

Sixth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 17, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

At the beginning of our second reading today Saint Peter urges the early Christians to do something. He tells them, “Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” That is something that each of us should do as well. But what does it mean to sanctify Christ in the heart? To understand what that means we should first start with what it means to ‘sanctify’. Generally speaking, to sanctify means to set apart, to put into a special place, to designate someone who has a role in the community that is different, special, even elevated. If we look to the Old Testament of the Bible we see that there were people, such as priests, prophets, and kings, who were sanctified, set apart and even elevated for the designated roles that they had which were to help the people stay close to God. In the case of the priests it was by offering sacrifices and leading the people in worship. The prophets were set apart because they communicated to the people God’s will and plans and values. And the kings were sanctified too because it was their role to keep the people faithful to God through moral and courageous leadership and by setting an example of faithfulness.

The sign that these people were set apart was the anointing with oil. This is important for us too because you have also been sanctified in baptism when you began a new life; a new life because in the waters of baptism you died to sin and rose to live for Jesus. As a sign of your sanctification you were also anointed with oil because your special, designated duty as a baptized Christian is to bring the light of Jesus Christ to the world around you. That is an awesome responsibility but one that God entrusts to you and every baptized Christian. We know from personal experience that bringing the light of Jesus Christ to the world is not always easy. There are things that demand our attention and if we are not careful can pull us away from the life of faith in God. There are also influences on us that are not so good and healthy which we have to be aware of and struggle against too. And we are, even with faith in God, still subject to temptations and fatigue.

So, what are we to do to make sure that we are actually bringing the light of Jesus Christ into the world according to the vocation we received in baptism? Well, we go back to that instruction of Saint Peter. Sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, that is, to give to Jesus Christ a prominent place in your life, in your heart that nothing else has, that no one else occupies, a

Sixth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 17, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

place of leadership, trust, confidence, and love, meaning that Jesus is allowed into and fully present and active in your life.

That is accomplished, as Jesus himself tells us, by having his commandments and observing them. Now, I will admit, that it is often part of human nature to chafe at obeying commands whether they are reasonable or not. Adam and Eve come to mind. Adolescents come to mind, people texting while driving come to mind, people protesting the shut-down orders come to mind and a lot more comes to mind. You get the point.

But here is why we should approach the commands of Jesus with a different mindset; they are not imposed, they are given, with love. They are for us, to lift us up and not to keep us down. Sin does that. The commands of Jesus never do. For example, Jesus said:

Avoid greed in all its forms.

Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven.

When you give alms do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Say "yes" when you mean "yes" and "no" when you mean "no," and nothing more.

Honor your father and your mother.

Do not steal.

Do not commit adultery.

Give to Cesar what belongs to Cesar and give to God what belongs to God.

Pray for those who persecute you.

Forgive and you will be forgiven

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength.

Is there anything that Jesus commands us to or not to do which we would be better off disregarding? To sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts is not an honorary thing. It is an actual thing to do, which requires an honest assessment of our lives. We need Jesus. We need his commandments, we need his love, we need his wisdom, we need his compassion. We need Jesus to be the shepherd of our lives.

Sixth Sunday of Easter / Year A / May 17, 2020 (Fr. Giese)

So, we lift Jesus up and give him this privileged place in our lives so that we might be raised to better lives. We sanctify him as Lord in our hearts, so that our hearts may be larger.

We are faithful to him because he is faithful to us. We love him because he first loved us.