

For the past month or so, I have been going back to the basics and proclaiming the new good of the gospel in the way the ancient church fathers proclaimed it. This was inspired by the convocation I attended in Portland at the beginning of May. There are four questions that the church fathers would address in their proclamation. First question: Why does anything exist? The answer: God created everything and called it good. Second question: Why are things so messed up? The answer: Sin. We and the rest of creation have been captured by an enemy (Satan) who wants to destroy us—and his hatred for us is personal. Remember, God cannot be defeated so the devil attacks those whom God loves. The third question: What, if anything has God done about this? The answer: He sent his beloved son on a rescue mission to save us, which he accomplished through his passion, death, and resurrection. The fourth question is, having been rescued, how do I respond? Created, captured, rescued, response: the proclamation of the gospel can be summed up in those four words. Don't worry if you missed it, because you'll hear it again.

Our response to the gospel of Christ is a major theme that runs throughout all of Saint Paul's letters and he hints at that in the reading we heard today. Paul wrote: "Christ indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." Jesus laid down his life for our sake, in order to rescue us from our sins and set us free from enslavement to the devil. Having been saved in this manner, we can do no less than live our lives for the one who saved us. God must come first.

Let me state this even more simply and bluntly: Having heard the gospel proclaimed, we have to make a choice. Are we for Jesus or against him? Not as a group of people, but as an individual. Am I for Jesus or am I against him? I cannot sit on the fence. I have to choose a side. In the book of Revelation, Jesus told Saint John to write to the church in Laodicea, "I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth." The message: be for the Lord or be against the Lord, but choose a side; don't make Jesus sick. Just make sure you choose the right side.

We are engaged in a war and in this war there is no such thing as neutrality. Our choices in this life will determine our eternal fate. The eternal outcome for each one of us is heaven or hell. Someone might ask, "well, what about purgatory?" Purgatory is not the neutral zone. Purgatory is a state of purification

for those who need to get cleaned up before they go to heaven. Don't aim for purgatory. If your aim is too low, you aren't going to like where you end up.

Christ died for us, so that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for him because he died for our sake and was raised. This is how Jesus rescued us from captivity and slavery to sin. Had he not done this on our behalf, the gates of heaven would be closed to us. How do we respond to this? Do we live for him?

Living for Christ means putting the Kingdom of God above everything else in our lives. Above our politics, above our desire for pleasure and entertainment, above our work, even above our families. That's not easy to do is it? Did Jesus ever say it would be? He tells us that we have to take up our crosses daily if we are going to follow him. Putting everything that is important to us in second place behind the kingdom of God can be a very heavy burden to bare, but when it gets too heavy, Jesus will be there to carry most of the weight. When the storms of life threaten to overwhelm us and we think we are going to perish we just have to call out to him and he will come and quiet the wind and the waves.

What does living for Christ look like? How do we actually do this? First of all, make attending Mass on Sundays or the vigil mass on Saturday your number one priority. God gave us Sunday as a day for us to come together as a family so that we can rest in His presence while we give Him the glory, praise and thanksgiving that He is due. If we truly believe that God is the one who created us out of love and rescued us when we were captured by sin, the very least we can do is spend an hour in his presence as a small gesture of thanksgiving. If there is a serious reason why you cannot come to Mass, watch it on tv, pray the rosary, and spend some time reading the scriptures.

Most Catholics who come to Mass only come to Mass once a week and that might be the only connection they have to the church. A ten minute homily once a week is not going to give you what you need to lead a life centered in Christ. Every single one of us needs to take responsibility for our faith and the faith of our families. There are a ton of very good resources that can help us do this but the two most basic things that every Catholic home must have is a Bible that gets read daily and a copy of the catechism of the Catholic Church. The catechism will keep us firmly grounded in the authentic teaching of the Church and we need this at a time when there are lots of voices and ideologies trying to lead us astray. I also strongly recommend that every member of the family have a rosary that they pray daily; the rosary is a meditation on the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of his

mother and nobody knows Jesus better than his mom. I can tell you from personal experience that the rosary is a lifeline that will keep you connected to Jesus; if you cut that lifeline you will be set adrift and your boat will sink. Every Catholic should also have a patron saint and each of us should know that person as if he or she was our best friend. Maybe it's your confirmation saint—mine is Saint John the Apostle. Maybe it's a saint or blessed that you've gotten to know in another way—for me I'll just say I have an army looking out for me and I've been told I need one. And I do. The final thing we all need is time set aside every day to be with our Lord in prayer. Put this on your calendars and be faithful to it, every single day.

Jesus died for us so that we might live for him. If he is truly the center of your world, everything else will fall into their proper places.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. Saint Joseph, pillar of families and terror of demons, pray for us.