

[Readings: Deut. 6:2-6; Ps.18; Heb. 7:23-28; Mark 12:28-34]

There are many names for Jesus in the New Testament: Lord, Master, Friend, Christ. All of these point to a different aspect of the person and mission of Jesus. Today, Jesus is referred to as “Teacher.” Think about a great teacher you had in your life. What were their inspiring characteristics? I can think of four.

They were good at conveying the message – they helped us learn something new. They were passionate about their subject – not just imparting knowledge but imparting passion. They were challenging – they brought more out of us than we knew we had. Most importantly, they made us grow.

Jesus is called teacher because he *teaches* us something new. He conveys a new message – a new reality – to us. He touches not just our head but our hearts as well. And He calls us to grow; to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. He says to the scribe: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” What is missing in the scribe? He needs to move from *knowing* the commandments to *doing* the commandments with the love of God, others and self. The hardest journey for him and for all of us is the shortest distance from the head (knowledge) to the heart (decision-making). Until our faith takes root in our heart, we will not yet be at the Kingdom.

To be incorporated into the Kingdom of God is to be transformed by God’s love. This can only happen through baptism; but we must *receive* it. We must take on a new heart. This transformation happens through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to grow; to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. So what does He teach us? He teaches us what it means to be a disciple; this involves two steps.

Step One is to: *Love God first, with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength.* Jesus reveals to us who God is. God’s heart is made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as we hear in the Second Reading, “offered himself” for us. God loves us to such a degree that He holds nothing back from us. His love for us is radical and intense.

And because God's gift to us is limitless – *ALL of Himself* – God can ask for ALL of us: our heart – the place of our decision-making and our soul – with our eternal destination in mind. Your mind – what you fill your mind with; the study and knowledge of God! And your strength – loving God is a battle against temptation; it requires a fight!

Step Two is to: *Love your neighbor as yourself*. St. John tells us, “Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1Jn 4:20). Disciples are called to follow Jesus; to love the people He loved. And He loved everyone. Because Jesus willingly gave Himself up for others, we are called to love them in deed, as well.

Our “Supreme Teacher” on earth – Pope Francis – met with President Joseph Biden on Friday of this past week. In a press conference following the meeting, President Biden was asked if the issue of abortion came up. President Biden said: “No, it didn't. It came up -- We just talked about the fact he was happy that I was a good Catholic, and I should keep receiving Communion.” He was then asked directly if the pope said he should continue receiving communion. President Biden responded: “Yes.”

Brian Burch, from CatholicVote.org is skeptical that this part of the conversation took place. The Vatican even issued their own statement summarizing the meeting and did not mention Communion. They also refused to confirm that Pope Francis discussed Communion with the president, calling it a “private conversation.” So what was really said? One guess: The pope might have made some comment to encourage Biden in his faith. Perhaps applauded him for his public gestures of piety. Maybe even encouraged him to attend Mass. But the pope most certainly did not say what the media (and Biden's Catholic backers) are suggesting, namely that Catholic public officials who aggressively advocate for killing innocent children are “good” Catholics who should continue receiving Communion. In fact, EVEN if the pope were to say this, it would be false. Church law, teaching, and tradition all say otherwise.

President Biden is in Rome as part of a European trip to press his agenda on climate change. According to sources, this is one of the things he discussed

with the pope. And contrary to what most of the left-sided media says, the defense of human life is not merely a side issue. It has everything to do with stewardship of the environment. Pope Francis wrote this in his own encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*:

“When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities -- to offer just a few examples -- it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” He wrote that it is “clearly inconsistent” to seek to protect endangered species while remaining indifferent to the decision of many “to destroy another human being deemed unwanted.”

The pope has called abortion “murder.” He’s equated it to “hiring a hitman.” He’s defended true care for the environment as beginning with care for God’s greatest gift -- human life.

Brian Burch, again from CatholicVote.org, was scheduled to appear on CNN with Chris Cuomo on Friday night to discuss this meeting between Pope Francis and President Biden. But at the last minute on Friday afternoon, Brian Birch said the producer for the show cancelled the interview, because they “didn’t want to cover abortion tonight.” You can draw your own conclusions.

And Moses spoke to the people, saying: “Fear the Lord, your God, and keep throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments... that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the Lord... to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.” And Jesus replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

May God keep us faithful to His teachings as we put His Words into action with courageous hearts and lives. AMEN!