

Trinity 14 – Resurrection, Ansonia 2017

“May only the word of God be preached; may only the word of God be heard.” Amen.

When I read the Epistle for this week, I found myself thinking that this was either a list of the lusts of the flesh or the TV Guide listing for an evening of television. Every one of the sins listed by the apostle Paul are available for viewing on television seven days a week at every hour of the day. I remember about twenty years ago my friend Joel Mark Solliday, a minister in Lewiston, Idaho, began a sermon by reading a synopsis of one of the daytime soap operas. The story line included adultery, rape, murder, demonic possession, witchcraft, and abortion. All available free to your home at 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon Monday through Friday for your viewing enjoyment. By the way, the name of the soap opera was, “The Days of Our Lives.” I certainly hope this isn’t the days of our lives!

We are constantly being bombarded by TV shows, movies, magazines, and music glorifying the very lusts of the flesh that Saint Paul was warning us about in the first century. Even the so-called “safe channels” like Disney and Nickelodeon sometimes have children and teens involved in questionable activities and situations. Networks and producers seem to compete with one another to see how far they can push the envelope. We won’t even talk about the commercials and music videos! When I complain about the content of these shows and commercials, I often hear the reply, “that’s just the way the world is today.” But that’s not just the way of the world today – it was the way of the world in the 1st century as well. We just do a better job of packaging and marketing today. Today, we try to convince ourselves that this is real life; that this is normal.

St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians points out that this is *not* real life. This is the lust of the flesh that separates us from the Spirit and seeks to

overwhelm us. In the Revised Standard Version, today's passage reads, *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

When Paul writes to a community like the Galatians, he wants to instruct them, to lift them up. He wants to build them up as a community of believers in order that they might live a normal Christian life. Unfortunately, many people in our society haven't got a clue as to what is a normal Christian life. So let's discuss what constitutes a "normal Christian life."

Fr. William Sisterman, from St. Dunstan's Anglican Church in Minneapolis, came up with a list of five characteristics of a normal Christian life:

- *First, to know Jesus personally, experientially and to give your whole life to Him as Lord.*
- *Second, to live in conscious awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is normal!*
- *Third, to live in a communal situation; to live in community.*
- *Fourth, to show forth the normal Christian life and the fruits of service to all God's children. Particularly this means the evangelization of the world.*
- *Fifth, that these communities of believers be related to each other in perfect unity.*

The first, to know Jesus personally and experientially and to give your life to Him as Lord. This should hardly be something that a priest would have to say to his people; yet it is necessary. To know Jesus is at the very

root and foundation of our Christian lives. To enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is to recognize Him as Lord - to go to Him, to know Him as a person, and to listen to Him. To know that He is Lord.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is the Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:9)

St. Paul wrote these words in the 10th Chapter of Romans. To confess that Jesus is the Lord is the very foundation of our Christian life, our normal Christian life, and a lot of people don't understand this. Back in the first century, before we developed our creeds, the very simplest creed in the Christian Church was "Jesus is Lord". It preceded Baptism. "Why are you here?" "Because Jesus is Lord." "O.K. be baptized." Later on, we expanded the creeds into what we now know as the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasius Creeds, but the simplest creedal statement at the very beginning of our Christian era was, "Jesus is Lord." To acknowledge this and to give ourselves wholly and completely to Him as Lord is the foundation of normal Christian living.

You and I, as we belong to a community of believers - a Church - aren't here because we have subscribed to a set of dry church teachings. So why are we here? What was our reason for coming to church this morning? It took a lot of energy to get ourselves out of bed, washed and dressed, in the car and drive here. And I'm very happy that we all did, but the reason for our being here is Jesus. We're here because Jesus called us, and we responded to that call. If we're not here for that reason, then, we might just as well go home. You see, we're here because the Lord has called us together. We have responded to what He has said.

We must understand that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ takes a whole lifetime, a process of growing in the Lord. We understand that as the Lord speaks to us, as we respond to Him, there is a purity of heart that you and I must develop. Paul lists all kinds of horrible things that we could get into in the reading this morning. Pray God we aren't into

all of that stuff. But we are a people who acknowledges very simply - or at least we should - that Jesus is the Lord. He is our Lord.

"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except in the Holy Spirit" (1Cor.12:3).

The second characteristic of normal Christian life is to live in conscious awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit. When we were baptized into the Body of Christ, we were given His life. The Spirit of Christ was poured out into us. It was given to us in order to create in us the heart of Jesus. We have to have the heart of Jesus and the very first thing that the Holy Spirit would teach us in a normal Christian life is that we can call God Abba, that is, Father. In the 4th chapter of Galatians, Paul writes:

The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of His Son which cries out, "Abba, Father." You are no longer a slave, but a son and the fact that you are a son makes you an heir by God's design (Gal. 4:6-7).

This is the way Jesus taught us to pray. When you pray, pray thus: "Abba, Father!" Nobody ever approached God up until the time of Jesus and called Him Abba. In ancient Israel and Judah, you didn't even use the name of God out of respect. Jesus tells us God is your Father. He tells us we can call Him Abba, Father. In Mark's Gospel when Jesus was suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, He used the word "Abba". He kept saying, *Abba (O Father), you have the power to do all things. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you would have it, not as I (Mark 14:36).*

It is normal in Christian life that you and I have a relationship with our Heavenly Father whereby we can call Him Abba, Father. If we live in conscious awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we understand that we live according to those gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have received and that dwell within us.

The Church has been given many gifts. It should be understood by all of us that you and I-all of us-are the Church. The gifts are given to the Church, not just to the ordained clergy. They are given to all of us for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

Many of the struggles that the Church faces today are a result of people trying to build the Body of Christ, not with the gifts of the Spirit, but with human power. No wonder it's struggling! We must remember that the Church is the Body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit; first, to call God Father, but also to utilize the gifts of the Spirit given to the Church to build up the Body of Christ. St. Paul lists some of these gifts in the 12th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians:

God has set up in the Church first apostles, second prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, assistants, administrators, and those who speak in tongues (I Cor. 12:28).

Is everyone an apostle or prophet or teacher? No. But each person within the Church is given the gifts that are necessary for the building up of the Church. Jesus has established the Church and will see to it that His Church survives and that it thrives if we all begin to live a normal Christian life using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to empower us.

This Bible is a great book: it is the word of God. And yet, what is it? It's a lot of ink on pieces of paper unless we understand that this Word has to be alive in its people. This isn't just the rule book. This is the operator's manual and we should look at it that way. And when we breathe the life of the Spirit into the Word of God, that's what we call Tradition. That's the living out of what is in here. That's the Tradition of the Church. And that is normal: not that we would read it as some kind of intellectual exercise, but that we would understand that contained within the Word of God is everything we need to live in this world.

To know Jesus, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and to live in a communal situation. It doesn't mean that we sell all, give everything to the poor, and all of us sit around in one great big building together in a commune. It means that we have within our community a network of committed relationships. The individualist who says he can live his Christian life outside the Church is an oxymoron. Besides just being a plain moron, he's an oxymoron. You can't live out a normal Christian life all by yourself unless you receive a very special calling to be a hermit. Otherwise we're called to committed relationships.

If we know Jesus and call Him our Lord, and God as our Father, then we call one another brother and sister. We don't use those words lightly. We commit ourselves to one another so that what is necessary and what is needed the community would provide. Jesus equipped His Church with all of the gifts necessary for the building of His Body, the Church. We need to start using them.

Unless we show our normal Christian lives and the fruits of service to God's people, we aren't living a normal life. When Jesus came into the world, He came in order to redeem mankind. He did that on the cross and He was raised up to the right hand of the Father. And now He is Lord. Now, in 2015, He is Lord. We are called to be the Body of Christ of which He is the head; we're the members and we are supposed to be the ones to carry the message of salvation to those that need it. All of us. Not just ordained clergy. If you think about it, look at all of the people that don't even know who Jesus is. I'm not even talking about all of the baptized pagans, but all of the people that have never heard of Jesus. If it's up to clergy to get to these folks, we'd better ordain about a million and a half people next week instead of just Deacon Marakovits! No, this is what the Body of Christ is supposed to do. All of us. It's all our work. We've been equipped by the Holy Spirit to do this.

This fifth item is something that would show us that none of us are living a normal Christian life: that these communities be related to each other in perfect unity.

That all may be one as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee. That they also may be [one] in us (Jn 17:21).

That was Jesus' prayer the night before He died. To Abba. To the Father. And that unity is still not there. Jesus has something better in store for us than all of the factions and divisions that we see in the Body of Christ. Normal Christian life isn't easy. This isn't a little holiness club we have joined. We have come here because we acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. We have been given the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been given the power to develop within us the heart of Jesus. We've been called to live a community life, a community of committed relationships with one another where we would respond to one another's needs. We know that the Body of Christ in a normal situation is here for the salvation of mankind and it is the work of all of us to evangelize the world. And we also know that it is the plan of Jesus that all be one. All of these are characteristics of a normal Christian life.

What we have to do is pray about this, understand it the best we can, and do what we can to live out this normal Christian life. What we have to do is exhibit in ourselves the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit. "By their fruits you will know them," said Jesus. St. Paul lists the fruits of the Holy Spirit that you can see. If you see them in a community, Jesus is there. You don't have to send people to a referral agency. If somebody is beaten down and hurt, you can say, "We got a little community. It's not a whole lot. But, you know, I think you will find Jesus there. Come and join us." We can do that. We can do that if we, as a community of Christians together here at the Church of the Resurrection, embrace the fruits of the Spirit:

... Love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity.

The fruits of the Spirit. If people see them among us in our lives, in our congregation, and in our community, they will be drawn to us, thinking, "Yes, there's the Lord. That's normal; that's where I want to be."

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.