

## **PIETY - DEVELOPING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST**

*Source: National Cursillo Center Mailing – December 2010*

The Cursillos in Christianity Movement provides us with a sure method to enable us to live what is fundamental for being a Christian in our God-given environments. This method is our interior tripod of Piety (Heart), Study (Intelligence), and Action (Will). These three attributes correspond to the basic functions of the human person; namely, to think, to want, and to act; actions which themselves correspond with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love.

Let us remember that God loved us first. How do we know this? Because our Lord Jesus Christ, in doing the Will of the Father, incarnated Himself in humanity in order to redeem it, and bring us the knowledge, life, and love of the Father prolonged through and in the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present in our life, living temples of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was so obedient to the Will of the Father that He underwent His Passion and Death and in so doing, died for you and me. In these actions, He was consciously introducing into this world an original love which was unknown until He himself lived it. By doing so, He was able to concretely and undeniably demonstrate how He understood and manifested His love: *“No one can give a greater proof of his love than by laying down his life for his friends.”* (Jn. 15:13)

The Passion and Death of Jesus should lead us to reflect on the love that God has for us not only as a community of believers but, as an individual love for each and every one of us. God loves each one of us in a profoundly intimate way.

Christ’s Passion and Death should also lead us to reflect and understand that as disciples who follow Jesus faithfully, we are called and expected to follow Him into dislike, ridicule, even persecution from those who find the Gospel threatening to their ways of thinking, wants, and actions. We must remember Jesus words; *“If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. No slave is greater than his master.”* (Jn 15:18, 20).

Love is therefore the gift of self and the desire for the happiness of one’s friends; a love which is so total that one is even willing to sacrifice oneself for them. Examples of this kind of generosity abound throughout New Testament scripture; for example in Romans 5:8, Paul tells us, *“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”*

The Lord goes even further. In John 15:9, we read, *“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.”* Consequently, there can no longer be a question of human attachment alone; Christ’s love is also divine love. To Love as Christ loves is to love both spiritually and humanly; to share in God’s own love and to extend it to others.

In a certain sense, the whole truth is love, because as Saint John tells us, *“God is love.”* (1 Jn 4:8). To love is to possess God and be ourselves immersed in God; it is the love of God in us, communicated by the presence of the three divine Persons, which will convert

us to live immersed in sanctifying grace, always following the path pointed out for us by the light of the Word of God. And it is thus that the love of God is manifested in us, transforming us and identifying us with the three divine Persons through our complete union with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for us to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in order for our piety to be genuine. And in order for this intimate relationship to start or to be rekindled with our Lord, King, and Redeemer, Jesus Christ; we must die to our self-centered attitude and human will.

The life of Saint Paul, patron saint of the Cursillo Movement, is a perfect example of a mirror by which we can examine the state of our own piety; of our intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul's encounter with Jesus was one that enabled him to realize the enormous love that God had for him, and made him encounter himself, a meeting of the self which made him realize the sinfulness, powerlessness, and nothingness that he was. It is only through this encounter with the Lord Jesus that caused Paul to realize that nothing else mattered but discerning and obeying God's Will.

It is through an intimate relationship with Jesus that we will experience the forgiveness and love of God; ability to surrender our will, and trust; and be obedient to God and thus become true disciples to our Master Jesus Christ; and surrender our will and let Jesus light the recesses of our soul.

If we do not go through this realization of our nothingness and daily reflection of our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection, it will be very easy for us to fall into a false belief; thinking that through our own efforts we are capable of living a pious life.

Jesus, our Savior, true God and true man, must be the ultimate end of all our devotions; otherwise devotions are false and misleading. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of everything. "*For this I labor and struggle,*" says Saint Paul, "*that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*" (Col. 1-28-29).

For in Him alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue, and perfection. In Him alone we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; He is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should actualize.

He is the Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can make us conscious and ever-growing in grace. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires.

We are given no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. God has laid no other foundation for our salvation, perfection, and glory than Jesus. As Jesus lives in us, if we live in Jesus, we need not fear anything.

Each hour of our life should project little by little a living, normal, and present Jesus Christ. The heart of the Good News is that God through Jesus Christ loves us, like Saint Paul expressed; *“the son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (Gal. 2:20) *“God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.”* (Gal. 4:6) *“For to me to live is Christ!”* (Philippians 1:21)

In the Piety Rollo, holiness is defined as “the direction of one’s whole life to God.” Direction implies a way, a path, a vision, a definite place towards which we are heading and one’s whole life is directed to God. We do not compartmentalize our faith. We cannot give God only part of us. It has to be all or nothing if our conversion is to remain valid. Remember the caricatures of spirituality described in the Piety Rollo; Sanctimonious, Practitioners and Pharisees. The problem with false piety is that our spiritual life becomes nothing more than an appearance and a self-centered personality.

Directing our whole life toward God – a meeting with a loving, personal God revealed to us through Jesus Christ – involves, first of all, knowing Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus means more than knowing about Him. We know Jesus Christ when we encounter Him personally. The goal of all our human action is to actualize Christ in order to be a channel of God’s love toward all people we encounter so that they may say; *“I believe because I have met Christ personally. He has touched my heart”*.

This knowledge of Christ is imparted by Christ Himself, not through mere human words and actions. People must see beyond us to Christ and must come to terms with Him on their own. Sharing our Life in Christ with our friends will enable them through the grace of God to encounter themselves and be in disposition to encounter a conversion. We must remember that metanoia can only happen with a change of heart and that change of heart cannot happen if Christ is reduced to doctrine or a system of belief.

Directing our whole life toward God means following Christ and to follow Christ is more than following an idea, a philosophy or a doctrine. Following Christ means devoting our life to the person of Christ. Jesus said, *“Follow me”*. Metanoia is not a conversion to a system, philosophy or message, but a turning of our minds and hearts completely to God. Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:17, *“May Christ find a dwelling place in your heart by faith”*. Following Christ does often bring us great glory and benefits. Not the worldly kind, but the kind that bears fruit for our eternal life. At the same time, following Christ is not always easy and often very uncomfortable. Christ tells Saint Peter in John 21 that he will someday go where he would not choose. Our life in Christ will often take us down roads that we could never imagine, but even when the road is difficult, it is worth the effort to travel it.

When we speak of a conversion, sometimes we take what looks good and discard the rest. It cannot be that way with Christ. Our daily circumstances and situations are always a part of our Life in Grace. Following Christ is not easy but, in order to keep the love of God alive in us, we must always be renewing ourselves. This is why Group Reunion and Ultreya are essential means for sharing our piety, study, and action. If we try to live the Life in Christ alone and on our terms, we are doomed for failure. Without a daily renewal of our initial conversion, the love for the Lord will quickly vanish.

Saint John of the Cross describes the third and final stage of the spiritual life as the Unitive Stage. The image he uses is the image of the log and the fire. A log (the soul) is thrown on to the fire (God) and eventually the log is consumed by the fire and the fire burns brightly. That is what our conversion to Christ is like. We become consumed by God's Love and are fully alive in Him.

However, when we abandon a genuine life of piety, our Life in Christ vanishes, but if we are conscious of our internal tripod; piety, study and action, we see this tripod as the logs that keep our intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ burning. This is what the Fourth Day is all about – not giving us momentary highs, but giving us something that will sustain us and keep the love of God burning for all time until we meet God face to face.

May we be able to echo the words that Christ said through Saint Paul, "*It's no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.*" (Gal. 2:20). This is true piety - our heart will love like Christ and will be open to allow us to put on the mind of Christ (study) and in time, our action, our attitude, and our human will, will be consumed by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and all our human acts will be the act of the Divine Will.