

SEPTEMBER 12 FATHER BERTAIO

I think you'd agree that in our so-called world today, a person's identity can sometimes be questioned. I'm told that a potential employer is not allowed to ask someone their religion because they'll be accused of discrimination. So, I'll go out on a limb and ask you to—don't tell me you can't do that through the TV—but if you're sitting with somebody beside you, are you a Christian? Really, are you a follower of Jesus Christ? Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I read this comment that states, “So what makes a Christian different, and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion?” And the answer, again, is found in the same quote: “It's simply and profoundly grace.” G-R-A-C-E. God's grace. It includes treating others not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated, with loving kindness and mercy. God is good to the just as well as to the unjust. His love, as you know, embraces everyone—saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate us and abuse us. He loves them the same way.

So, “our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish toward us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has for us.” For them and for us. Now, you're probably saying it's easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit something, or nothing, in return. Be good to those who are going to make fun of you, and so on... Be kind to them without expecting them to change their minds. If they do, it's a bonus. If they don't, God is good to them as well.

And so, be upfront and honest with them if you can. Of course, doing this is much more rewarding for you, as it allows you to feel good about how you treat someone else. I ran into this beautiful quote from Saint Augustine, who states that there are two things in prayer. I think it's good to keep this in mind, and I try to remember it all the time. They are

to give and forgive—the two wings of prayer. To give and to forgive. You can't fly with just one wing. Two wings.

In other words, “To pardon the offender for what has been committed and to give to the person in need.” So, the person who has offended you, forgive them, whether you feel that they deserve it or not, because they are in need. You need to have these two wings to forgive and, of course, to give. These two remind us of maybe yourself or someone you would like to be like. To be able to forgive from the heart.

And you might say, “I can't!” Well, do you know someone—really, someone—who's so perfect that you would like to be like them? Ha! Of course, you do. And I'll remind you, if you've forgotten. Today, we celebrate the Holy Name of Mary. Yes, yes, of course, the Holy Name of Mary. In the missalette of *Living With Christ*, we read that “This feast honouring the Name of Mary was instituted by Pope Innocent XI in the 17th Century.” “God, the Father, is glorified,” as it states, “by the exalted role in salvation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” Thus, “Her name is one of honour, a holy name, a maternal name, and a name that is responsive to the needs of the Church.”

This feast day, by the way, is celebrated four days after celebrating the birth of Mary on the 8th of this month. But you know, on the 8th of this month was a Sunday, and Mary, of course, gives it over to her Son—who is a lot more important for her and for us. Mary gives everything to the Son; she just takes a back seat. So, we could be celebrating the birth of Mary in a very, very special way, but that's okay. We still celebrate her every day, as we do at least every time I celebrate the Mass and bring you in with me to honour her through praying the Hail Mary.

As Saint Luke reminds us, Mary identified herself as the handmaid of the Lord. Who do you identify with? Like I said before, are you having a hard time forgiving someone? Really? Why? Are you suffering from your own hurt? Are you suffering from your own inability, from your own illness, or maybe being abused, like many of us have been throughout the years? Can you not let that person, or that individual, or that situation go? And live free...

Don't carry the guilt around on your shoulders, because you'll end up with a hunchback, and that's not good. Let them go. Live free. Mary did. If you can imagine how Mary suffered in seeing her only Son being spat upon, kicked, and lied to, she kept on crying and forgiving... Why can't we?

Dear friends in Christ, each and every day, reaching out to His mother, who was already there to forgive. To give and to forgive... sets us free. As I said before, and continue to say it again, life is too short to live with guilt—to live with this weight in our conscience. You're better than that. Take some time, forgive, and receive God's blessing and Mary's blessing every day of your life. Live happy, and live long—free and forgiven. Amen.