

JANUARY 10, 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

"That you may have eternal life."

This is the very last sentence of our first reading, from the first letter of John. And that is the purpose of the letter. "That you may have eternal life." As we journey through life, there are things that we want, there are things that we need. But the ultimate end, in the end, there is only one thing necessary, *unum necessarium*, as we hear it in that beautiful scene of Jesus, with Mary and Martha. Mary has chosen the better part. This is the better part, eternal life. The author tells us that our belief in Jesus Christ makes us victors and conquerors of this world. That is quite different from the reality in which we live in. To be *el numero uno*, to be the chief honcho, to be the number one in society, it depends on whether you have a large bank account, whether you have many stock options, whether important businesses want you as the chairman of their board. And most especially, if your house is at least between 7,000-8,000 square feet. In fact, it should be so large that it could be considered, at a minimum, a small hotel. Only then you are the number one.

And why is this great standard that the world puts around us? It's because we are filled in our world with hatred, with greed, with self-centeredness, with an attitude of entitlement. And because of that, we want everything, and everybody should listen to us. But the letter, that first reading tells us, our belief in Christ triggers the love of God. And as we hear in Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical, "Love changes everything. Hands and faces, earth and sky. Love changes everything. How we live, and how we die." "Love will never, never let you be the same again."

This love of God, because of our belief in Jesus Christ, breaks those chains that tie us in our world today. Of greed, of hatred, of entitlement, of self-centeredness. And it allows us to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. The word in our readings today, we hear the word "testimony." We hear

it nine times. It is not a word that you and I use in our everyday language. If I go to apply for a job, they don't ask me for a testimony. But they ask me for references. And references usually means, I testify that this person is capable of doing the job that he is applying for. And yet, nine times we hear this word, "testimony," or "witness," or "references."

We speak about the testimony of the Spirit, the testimony of water, the testimony of blood. It speaks about the witness of the Spirit, and as soon as we hear that, we know about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that were given to us at our baptism, that were given to us at confirmation. The gifts of wisdom, understanding, and love. The gifts of counsel, fortitude, and piety. The gifts of the fear of God. And the gift of understanding is the one that we use most often. Because it helps us to understand what God is calling us to, and what are the responsibilities involved in this.

When we live according to the witness of the Spirit, truly we can witness to God's love within our hearts. And then you have the witness of water, or the testimony of water. And at once we remember our own baptism. And as Paul tells us, we were baptized into Jesus Christ. And once we are baptized into Jesus Christ, just as God made the covenant with the people of Israel, in the Exodus experience, God makes that covenant with us. You belong to Jesus Christ, you move, and you live, and you have your being in Jesus Christ. Because of that sacrament of baptism. And therefore, the witness and the testimony of water is that you belong to Jesus Christ, and you act in his name.

And finally, we have the witness of blood. As soon as we think of blood, we think of the oodles of blood in the Passion. When they scourged Jesus, when they crowned him with thorns, when he walked on the wake, carrying the cross to Calvary. And finally, when he was nailed to

the cross, blood flowed in abundance. And so, we hear and we see, the centurion piercing the side of Jesus, and out of it flowed blood and water. Because of that blood and water we have been set free. Free to choose. As William Ernest Henley would say, Now I can choose, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." I can choose to do what I want, I can choose evil, I can choose good. And we see Jesus using this choice in our reading today, in the story of the man with leprosy.

As Father Henk said on the Feast of Saint Basil the Great, and Gregory Nazianzen, you are not defined by your vocation. And he gave us the example of a policeman and a pianist, you don't define them by the work that he does, and today you don't define this man by the sickness that he has. For the people around, he was a leper. He had to be kept at bay, he wasn't allowed to come in society. But to Jesus he was a man with leprosy, who could be cured. And Jesus chose to make that decision. "If you choose, you can clean me." And Jesus says, "I do choose."

There are times when Jesus would choose without being asked. For example, when he cured— When he raised to life the son of the widow of Nain. Nobody asked him to do that. When he cured the paralytic in Mark, chapter two. He wasn't asked to do that. But this time he is asked, and whenever you ask Jesus, he answers our call, and he will heal us. All we have to do is to ask. And then Jesus heals him and sends him back to the community. That is where he belongs, that is where you and I belong. It is so sad that we can keep people at bay, because of things they do, or because of our preconceptions of them. May our hearts and minds be open, to look at a person, and see that person as truly the son or daughter of God. God bless you all.