

Solemn Novena to St. Ann

100th Anniversary

July 23, 2024

Preaching of Rev. Justin Nelson Alphonse, C.P.

Some years ago, I was helping out with confession for one of the schools in Birmingham, Alabama. They were going to receive their first Holy Communion, so they were all second-grade children.

As I was listening to the children's confessions, one girl came to me. As she confessed her sins, I usually ask for the little children to have a conversation. I asked her, do you want to be a good person or a bad person? To my surprise, this little girl said, Father, I want to be a saint.

God wants all of us to be saints. God wants all of us to be holy. That is our ultimate goal. But it is that sin that prevents us from experiencing God's total love in our life. That's why when Jesus begins his ministry, his first words were, repent and believe in the gospel. Repent and believe in the gospel.

As Martin Buber would beautifully say, life is a relationship. Without relationship, life is nothing. It is like one before a hundred. When you remove one from the hundred, what remains is zeros. So also, without relationship, our life is nothing. But in human life, relationship is something that we all enjoy.

But it is also the same thing in relationship that we all struggle. If I ask you this question, try to answer it honestly. What are the challenges that you face in relationship? What are the challenges that you face in relationship? And people would say, misunderstanding, mistrust, infidelity, lack of communications, inferiority complex, superiority complex, impatience.

When I mention all these things, you might have thought about, he's right. So, when I was mentioning this, did you have someone in mind? And for sure, it was not you. Very often we think of relationships, if this person changes, my life is going to be different. If this person changes, my life is going to be different.

Today the Lord is inviting us that we ourselves need to change. We ourselves need to let go of our sinful ways. We ourselves need to build up a relationship with God and relationship with one another. And that is what the Lord is inviting us today, to have a relationship with one another. And that's why when Jesus gives, when he says, love God and love humanity, that love, he also gives a condition.

In today's world, whenever you buy a product, there is a condition implied. Even when you download an app into your phone or into your computer, they have conditions. So, you have to follow those conditions.

So same way, Jesus' condition is one very simple condition he gives. When you bring your gift to the altar, and if you remember that you have something against your brother, leave your offering there, go back and be reconciled and return and give your offerings to God. And that is the only thing that God wants from us.

As Matthew, in the Gospel of Matthew, he puts it very clearly when he teaches how to pray the Our Father. And we say in the second part of the Our Father, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. The way we forgive others is the way we are going to be forgiven.

And Matthew's Gospel, he goes on to say one more step very clearly. If you forgive the wrongdoings of the other, then the Heavenly Father is going to forgive you. When you do not forgive the wrongdoings of the other, your Heavenly Father is not going to forgive you.

So always, the measure you give is the measure you are going to be given back. The more you forgive, the more you are going to be forgiven in your life. Always remember, if you have someone in your mind, if you are someone that you have been hatred towards or anger towards, this is the time to allow God to come in your life and say, Lord, I am willing to forgive this person wholeheartedly, and I am willing to let go of my anger, let go of my resentment, let go of my hatred, and forgive them wholeheartedly.

You know, when in the Gospel of Mark, beautifully it says, when he is recognized as the Son of God, it is not when he turned the water into wine. It is not when he fed the 5,000. It is not when he gave sight to the blind. It is not when he healed the crippled man. It is not when he cured the lepers. It is not when he washed the feet of his disciples.

It is when he, even though he was unjustly condemned, even though when he was spat upon, beaten, suffered, and nailed to the cross, from the cross he was able to say, Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. Even from the cross, with all these humiliations, he was able to say, Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing. And as he said, Father, I commend my spirit.

And my dear brothers and sisters, that is the time when people watch this man, that this man is something great. And that is why the centurion was able to say, this man was truly a Son of God. This man was truly a Son of God.

When Jesus was able to forgive, even from the cross, and that is where that godliness comes into our life. So, God became human so that we too all become divine in our life. Yesterday, after the 8 o'clock Mass, as I was walking in the corridor, I met a young man and he asked me, Father, if I could bless the medal that he had. I said, sure. And I asked his name, what is your name? He said, Zachary. And then when we got into conversation, he said something very profound. He said, Father, in 2018, when Father Rick was preaching on the first day of St. Ann's Solemn Novena, that I heard his message. He said, if you want to change, this is the time to change and give your life to God. Don't postpone. Don't tell yourself next week or next month or next year. Give your life to God right now. And that's what this man said;

Father, I was addicted to drinks. And Father, that moment, I felt that I need to give it up. And he said, Father, it's been six years I've given up my drinks.

And this is my seventh year, and I want you to bless this religious medal so that I can persevere in being sober in my life and giving my life to God. And this is what the Lord is inviting all of us. Let us give our life to God.

Let us be reconciled with God and reconciled with one another as we bring our life, our gift to the altar. Let us be reconciled as God invites us to be reconciled. So, as we celebrate this Solemn Novena, let us ask for God's grace that we may open to God's grace in our life to say, Father, I forgive anyone that I have anger towards or anyone that I have hatred towards, anyone I have resentment to. I forgive them wholeheartedly, deep from my heart. Lord, I forgive them from my heart. Amen.