

Solemn Novena to St. Ann

100th Anniversary

July 25, 2024

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

Once a young teenager felt a call within that he wanted to become a sannyasi. Sannyasi means a Hindu priest or a wanderer.

This young boy went to his mom and said, Mom, I want to become a sannyasi. Can I go? And his mom responded, go to the kitchen and get me a knife. And so, he went to the kitchen and got her the knife and gave it to her. And she told him, No, my son, you don't go. A few months later, still the urge within him was so strong that he wanted to become a sannyasi. So, he went back again to his mom and said, Mom, I want to become a sannyasi. Can I go? And this time again, she told him, go to the kitchen and get me a knife. And he got her the knife. And this time again, she said, my son, you don't go. And then a few years later, still there was an urge that was so strong within him that he wanted to become a sannyasi. So, he went and approached his mom for the third time, said, Mom, I want to become a sannyasi. Can I go? And again, she told him, go to the kitchen and get me a knife. And he got her the knife and gave it to her. And this time the mother told him, My son, now you're ready. You can go.

And now this young man was so confused. What is my call to become a sannyasi and the knife in the kitchen? And he was trying to figure it out and he could not. Finally, he asked his mom and said, Mom, is there any connection between my call to become a sannyasi and the knife in the kitchen? She said, Yes. And can you tell me before I leave the house, tell me what it is? And she gave this beautiful response. She said, my son, when I asked you for the first two times, you brought the knife to me and you had the handle towards you and the sharp edge towards me. And when you brought for the third time, you had the sharp edge towards you and the handle towards me. And she went on to say, when you are willing to risk your life for the sake of others, then you are ready to become a sannyasi. When you are unwilling to risk your life for the sake of others, then you are not ready to become a sannyasi.

Our Christian discipleship is the same. When we are willing to risk our life for the sake of others, then we are ready to become a good disciple of Christ. When we are unwilling to risk our life for the sake of others, then we are not ready to become a sannyasi. In today's gospel reading, we heard the mother of the sons of Zebedee approaching Jesus and wishing that her two sons would sit, one on the right and one on the left, in his kingdom.

And she did not know what she was asking for, but even James and John would respond, yes, we can drink the cup from the chalice. And Jesus says to the disciples, all the rest of them who are so jealous of them, he tells them, if you want to be great among you, that you should become a servant of all. If you want to be the first among you, then you need to become a slave of all.

And he goes on to say, the son of man has come not to be served, but to serve. And then he goes on to say that I have come to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. What a wonderful gift that Jesus has shown us.

In the gospel today that we heard, that Jesus washes his disciples' feet. That what I have done, your master and teacher has done, washing the feet of you, that you must do the same. We are all called to serve.

We are all called to serve one another and even to lay down our life for others. And that's what the martyrs did. That's what the prophets did. That's what the early Christians did. And that's what we are all called to do. We are all called to serve one another and even to lay down our life for others.

You know, at the end of our life, there are six questions the Lord will ask us. Do you know what are those? It is in the gospel of Matthew in chapter 25 and towards the end of the chapter in the solemn judgment of our last days. Where Jesus would say, when I was hungry, you gave me food to eat.

When I was thirsty, you gave me water to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was sick, you visited me. When I was in prison, you visited me. And they will ask them, when did we see you Lord, hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, sick and in prison? And the Lord will say, whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done unto me. And that is what we are all called to be. We are all called to serve one another and to take care of the need of the other. And that is why I like to share with you one of the beautiful experiences that I have in this country.

About 18 years ago, I was preaching in a country parish in Kansas City, Missouri. And before the mass, I was greeting people as people came in for mass. And there was a lady who had a child on her lap as she was holding him. And we had a conversation and she welcomed me and I welcomed her as she was coming into the church. And as I was asking her, is it your grandson? Because she looked in her 60s. And she said, no, no, no father. He is my adopted son from Korea. And I am 64 years old and I have three other daughters that I adopted. One from Mexico, other one from Guatemala, other one from Japan. And what is interesting in all those things is that all those four kids were either physically or mentally challenged. They are special need kids. And I asked her, why do you? And she said, father, I would wish to adopt one more kid from India, but I am already 64 years old. And this boy needs a lot of attention. And I asked her, why do you adopt these kinds of children? And her response was so profound. She said, father, there are many families who are willing to adopt healthy and good kids, but there are very, very few families who are willing to adopt these kinds of children. And I want to be a few of those families who adopt these children. Imagine for parents that to take care of a healthy child is how challenging it is. But imagine this woman has taken the challenge of taking care of all those four kids. One was mentally special kids, and then another one was a dwarf, and another one was almost crippled, and another one was mentally challenged. But she took care of them, and she showed her unconditional love for them, and sacrificing her whole life in looking after them.

And that is what Christian life is all about. And that is what beautifully in the tombstone of Muhammad Ali in Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky, you will see the service you do

to others is the rent that you pay in heaven. The service that you do to others is the rent that you pay in heaven.

So, I encourage and invite all of you. There is a beautiful saying of Stephen in a nicely written, what you give is yours, what you keep is lost. Beautiful saying. What you give is yours, what you keep is lost. And I invite you to pray with me, and please close your eyes and recite with me this final prayer.

Christ be with me.

Christ be with all those who are around me.

Christ be in my mind.

Christ be in the mind of those who think about me.

Christ be in my eyes.

Christ be in the eyes of those who see me.

Christ be in my ears.

Christ be in the ears of those who listen to me.

Christ be in my mouth.

Christ be in the mouth of those who speak to me.

Christ be in my arms.

Christ be in the arms of those who reach out to me.

Christ be in my legs.

Christ be in the legs of those who lead me.

Christ be in my heart.

Christ be in the hearts of those who love me.

Christ be with me.

Christ be with all those who are around me. Amen.