



Issue No. 5: October 25, 2020

What: Weekly Catholic Athletes for Christ message

Why: To keep our faith & athletics intersected

Who: All Catholic High Schools across the Diocese

From: Fr. Zach Edgar, Diocesan CAC Chaplain

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GREETINGS, RAIDERS!

I hope what I've sent to you so far is helping you pray during the week and gives you something to think about as you hear the readings at Mass on Sunday. If there's a way these can be more helpful, please send your feedback!. Your CAC moderators and admins are in weekly contact with me, so just reach out! Say a *Hail, Mary* for me too, please. Thanks!

Since October 23rd is the feast day of St. Anthony Marie Claret, let's meditate on his reflection on the power of the Charity of God... Come Holy Spirit! Kindle in us the fire of Your Love!

Love is the **most necessary** of all virtues. Love in the person who preaches the Word of God **is like fire** in a musket. If a person were to throw a bullet with his hands, he would hardly make a dent in anything; but if...gunpowder [is] behind it, it can kill. It is much the same with the Word of God. If it is spoken by someone who is filled with the fire of charity - **the fire of love of God and neighbor** - it will work wonders. - St. Anthony M. Claret

This Sunday is: 30th in Ordinary Time

Our focus is on: God's divine Love

On recognizing what is actually *most* important.

We hear many times throughout our life that we should "keep our priorities in order." It's so easy to get caught up in secondary or petty things that don't even begin to compare to the things that are

truly important. In this pandemic, for instance, we've heard many opinions on what is "essential" and "non-essential." The Lord sometimes will allow people or things or opportunities that we thought were "essential" to be removed from us, in the hope that, **instead of looking for yet-another thing to fill the God-sized hole we have in our hearts, we will, with clearer vision, choose Him first.**

Last week we talked about the three gifts God gives to us at baptism: supernatural faith, hope, and love. That love, *His divine* love alive in us, is how we will be recognized at the end of our lives - as belonging to God or not. In every human weakness or failing we could ever have, God's love, His Mercy, is the medicine that makes us strong. One of my favorite one-liners from the Old Testament is the refrain to the psalm this Sunday: "I love you, Lord, my strength!" (Ps. 18:2) Whether things are going well or poorly, that prayer, "You *are* my strength Lord, and I *do* love You," is the answer. It acknowledges that He has something that we need that we can never get anywhere else, and that we can't "do life" without Him. **Just praying everyday, "I need you, Lord," is so important.**

But if you're not on top of the mountain in the spiritual life right now, fist-pumping the air and thanking God for how good He is, take hope in the way St. Paul describes the conversion process of the Thessalonians this week. They went from a life of idol worship to believing in the one, true God, to the point that they became a "model for all believers" (1 Thess 1:7). With the help of the Holy Spirit (which we can ask for everyday) they not only openly shared their faith just as St. Paul did with them, but they did so even though the Word of the Gospel caused them "great affliction." It still gave them great joy because coming to know Jesus changed *everything* for them. It literally gave them a new life. Paul courageously shared with them the Good News, and they were inspired to do the same thing for others. **Nothing was more important or more urgent.**

In the coach-to-athlete relationship, there's also often a sense of urgency: some instruction or tweak that a coach wants to see implemented quickly. Athletes, however, don't often see these things with the same urgency. When looking back, say, from a person's senior year to their freshman year, incredible

progress can typically be seen. It may not seem like a huge deal in the moment, but **our cooperation in the overall plan is incredibly important.** Otherwise we'll never grow, never realize our potential.

Being able to look back at where we've come from in the spiritual life to where we are today, even if it's been a roller coaster, is a great way to stay grateful and see how everything, in its own way, gave us an opportunity for deeper union with God. Sometimes we need somebody wiser than us to come along and say, "remember where you came from!" That's even happening in the part of the Book of Exodus that we'll hear Sunday, where the people of Israel are reminded that they themselves were once strangers with no homeland, and don't forget that when *you* encounter a foreigner. Remember how you wanted to be treated when you were in their shoes! **How important it is to keep proper perspective!** That perspective is exactly how pride is supposed to be defeated in our lives by the gift of humility.

But we all need a piece of humble pie more often than we'd like to admit, and the Lord is trying to constantly teach that lesson of humility to the often-warped perspective of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were supposed to be both educated in and living out the Word of God as revealed in the Law and the Prophets. This part of Matthew's Gospel sees both groups get "put in their place" by Jesus. He used an encounter between God and Moses from the book of Exodus, which were certainly scriptures they *should* have understood, to silence the Sadducees who did not believe in the possibility of Resurrection from the dead. Then, in Sunday's Gospel, Jesus immediately puts the Pharisees in their place by teaching them what **the most important part** of His Father's law is - Love God with everything you've got and love your neighbor as yourself.

Remember the Pharisees were often wrapped up in externals, and there were many disciplinary laws laid down in Leviticus that they wanted to strictly enforce. There were 613 of them, in fact! Jesus isn't wading through these to decide which one is the most important. Instead, He summarizes the 10 Commandments, which are unchanging Divine Law, and of a much higher degree than any disciplinary law, as the need for mankind to Love God (Commandments 1-3) and to love our neighbor (commandments 4-10) as the highest good. So the first 3 commandments deal with our right relationship with God, and the last 7 deal with right-relationship with our neighbor. The 3 and 7 are very important because in the Hebrew language 7 indicates perfection and 3 indicates the highest degree of something. Their language doesn't have superlatives like English, so there is no word "holiest" in Hebrew, but they would say "holy, holy, holy" three times in a row to convey the same idea. That's why we still have so many repetitions of three in our traditional prayers. So the Commandments in their two parts, 3 and 7, signify the *highest perfection*. And for anyone who thinks it is disingenuous to cast aside those 613 disciplinary laws, Jesus, who said earlier in Matthew's Gospel that He "did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it," is trying to re-focus the Pharisees on what is *most important* - the Eternal Law. In fact, in that same previous passage, we hear that "not one iota will pass from the law" - but the subtlety here is that Iota is the Latin and Greek transliteration of the Hebrew letter Jod, which, since every Hebrew letter carries a numerical value, stands for - you guessed it - the number 10. *Not one Jod*, signifying the 10 Commandments, *will pass from the Law*, because those 10 are eternal law, not disciplinary laws. And how do we keep first things first? By seeing our love of God (first 3 commandments) and our love of neighbor (last 7 commandments) as **the most important** things in our relationship with Him. May we have hearts to follow these guard rails that line the "narrow way" to real unity with God - unity that we so badly need now and unity forever in heaven.

When we freely choose that path to real freedom in rightly loving God and neighbor, we can really mean it when we pray, **"I love you, Lord, my strength!"**

Resolution: Meditate on **how you view rules.** Do you do things because you "have to" or are you motivated by love for the person that asked you? If you had to explain the 10 Commandments to a young child, would you say "here's a bunch of rules you have to follow because I said so" or "here are the things God told us we ought to do in order to belong to Him and see Him in heaven"? Has your perspective on rules been damaged by someone who was unfair to you? Can you forgive/pray for them? Ask God for the light to see His Commandments as gateways to freedom and grace instead of as chains that are holding you down. Every night, use the 10 commandments as an examination of conscience for how you did at living out your faith that day. **Good or bad, ask for the ability to do better tomorrow.**

Our Lady of Victories & Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us!