

Fr. Alex Zenthoefner
15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C
07.14/15.07

Good friends are hard to come by. I'm not talking about someone who is fun to hang out with or someone who makes you laugh or tells good stories. I'm talking about the really good friend, the friend who makes you more yourself and looks out for you; the friend who will tell you if you have broccoli between your teeth or that you need to check your zipper; you know that this person is your friend because by telling you these things he or she has absolutely nothing to gain—it is a purely selfless act. The not-so-good friend would rather put up with the distraction than create an awkward situation, but the good friend wants what is best for the other, even though the other person may not want to hear it. And we know that experience of gratitude when we are saved by a good friend from what could have been a humiliating experience.

To speak the truth in love is one of the most difficult things, but it becomes bearable when you realize that it is for the benefit of the other. There was a man who lived this perfectly. He was the Good Samaritan, par excellence. He came to a people who were desperate for help and He provided for them a way out by giving Himself to the point of death. He Himself became the way from despair to hope, from sin to freedom. And, so that this “way” may not only be for the people of His time, He passed it on to His followers by promising to remain with them to the end of time, so that future generations might also experience the saving power of Christ. Jesus established the Church so that in our day we might not be left in the ditch like that poor Jew on the way to Jericho. This is why the Church must be able to address every aspect of our lives because when I am hungry for the Bread of Life I can come here. When I am lonely, I can be a part of this community. When I am lost and need to be forgiven, or when I am sick and need healing, or when I have decided that I want to spend the rest of my life with this person or give my life in the service of others, the Church is there for them all and in doing so, brings Jesus into every aspect of our lives. This is the gift that we have been given.

Just this past week our Holy Father Benedict defended this gift and he defended it for our sake, because he wants what is best for us. Unfortunately, what most people saw

was what our paper wrote about the statement that was released from the Vatican early this week rather than the original document. If you didn't see it, the paper headline this past Tuesday read, "Catholicism is only path to salvation, says Pope." This very statement is directly contradicted by what is said in the actual document, which, when speaking of other faiths, said, "In fact, the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as instruments of salvation." Time and again our media twists the words that come from the Church and they are leading people away from the truth and they are preventing people from recognizing the true gift of faith that has been given to us. Pope Benedict wants us to appreciate the gift that we have been given, which is nothing less than the presence of Christ Himself who still exists and who still saves. What should the Pope say: should he say that the gift that we have been given no longer exists? Should he say nothing so that the gift goes unrecognized? The only reasonable thing for the Church to say is that the gift that was given in the beginning to Peter and his successors has been passed on to us today: this is nothing new! It is unfortunate that there are some who twist the words of our Pope and make him sound like an evil tyrant who is hoarding something or who is condemning others. And what is perhaps more disturbing is that so many trust our paper more than they trust our Pope, who has been given to us to lead us to Christ, this is his mission: what is the great mission of our paper; whose benefit is the paper meant to serve? My dear people, the Pope is inviting all people who are looking for Christ to come to the Church, because this is where He promised to be. It is certainly true that He is in other places as well, but if you want to be certain that Christ is present, then look to the Catholic Church. As we heard in that first reading, what we have been given "is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it?'" The message has come to us in the flesh and He remains with us through the concrete and tangible reality of the Church. So that with water and oil and bread and wine, with things that we can touch and see and smell and taste, Jesus might be made known to us again and we may be able to say with certainty that He is here because I have seen Him with my own eyes. We should not say, "How dare the Pope say these things," but we ought to say, "How can we keep from saying these things all the time" so that all people might come to experience the presence of Christ, living and true among us.

My friends, let us not neglect the gift that we have been given. Let's not shy away from expressing the certainty that we have been given by Christ that He is with us always and that He will not abandon us. Jesus, the Good Samaritan, remains our neighbor forever, constantly lifting us from the ditches that we so often fall in, tending to our needs and promising that He will return to ensure our wellbeing. What a beautiful gift, a living gift that is always new, presenting Himself to every generation through the Church.