

19th National Cursillo Encounter
California State University San Bernardino
July 30 – August 2, 2009
“Piety”

As we journey toward the New Jerusalem, we who have lived a Cursillo of Christianity, should raise our hearts and hands and voices, in a spirit of plenary gratitude to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, for having been given the opportunity to have lived our Cursillo, for the privilege of being allowed to collaborate in God’s salvific plan, and for the honor of being invited to help build the Kingdom of God through this gift from Heaven that we know as Cursillos of Christianity Movement.

As you and I know, God does not need anything or anyone to be God; to be complete, to love or be loved, because God is Love; God is Completeness itself, and God is fully Self-sufficient. “The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, nor is He served by human hands because He needs anything. Rather it is He who gives to everyone life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:24-25).

However, because of His love for us, God gave His only begotten Son to reconcile humanity (His image) so that we may attain our absoluteness; that is to say, our true nature, identity and purpose which is to love and to be loved.

The Cursillos of Christianity Movement provides us with a sure method that enables us to live what is fundamental for being a Christian in our God-given environments. This method is our interior tripod; Piety (Heart), Study (Intelligence), and Action (Will). These three actions correspond with the basic functions of the human person; namely, to think, to want, and to act; actions which themselves correspond with the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love.

We were informed during our Cursillo that in order to stay Christ-centered we are to be conscious and ever-growing in grace through our interior tripod. During this 19th National Cursillo Encounter we will have an opportunity to examine our interior tripod of piety (heart), study (intelligence), and action (will).

This morning, I would like to share with you some essential ideas about piety. To begin with, let us remember that God loved us first. How do we know this? Because our Lord Jesus Christ, in doing the Will of the Father, incarnated Himself in humanity in order



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to redeem it, and bring us the knowledge, life, and love of the Father prolonged through and in the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present in our life, living temples of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was so obedient to the Will of the Father that He underwent His Passion and Death and in so doing, died for you and me. In these actions, He was consciously introducing into this world an original love which was unknown until He himself lived it. By doing so, He was able to concretely and undeniably demonstrate how He understood and manifested His love: *“No one can give a greater proof of his love than by laying down his life for his friends.”* (Jn. 15:13) Love is therefore the gift of self and the desire for the happiness of one’s friends; a love which is so total that one is even willing to sacrifice oneself for them. Examples of this kind of generosity abound throughout New Testament scripture; for example in Romans 5:8, Paul tells us, *“But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”*

The Lord goes even further. In John 15:9, we read, *“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.”* Consequently, there can no longer be a question of human attachment alone; Christ’s love is also divine love. To Love as Christ loves is to love both spiritually and humanly; to share in God’s own love and to extend it to others. That is what makes the meaning of the Christian notion of *agape* specific and new. Its origin and nature are heavenly, and this unique interpretation of love has the power to unite all God’s children within the Church. Clearly, then, *agape* has something of the infinite about it and, clearly, it is without measure. Christ alone has projected its perfect realization.

Love that is real must also be active and manifest; that is, able to display witness and proof. It must be love so special that it cannot possibly be confused with any counterfeit. It must be an attachment so broad, constant, and patient that even strangers can see in the fulfillment of the command of Christ. They must see Christ’s and the Father’s way of loving, and Their presence in the community of His disciples. *Agape* is the “mark” of the visible Church, because no one can possess this love unless she or he has been chosen and loved by God, who transmits this form of love to him or her in His beloved Son, who is present with His Father, through, with, and by love, in the midst of His own. *“Whoever loves*



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me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” (Jn 14: 23).

In a certain sense, the whole truth is love, because as Saint John tells us, *“God is love.”* (1 Jn 4:8). Thus, to love is to possess the greatest gift of God, Himself, because it is to possess God Himself.

To love is to possess God and be ourselves immersed in God; it is the love of God in us, communicated by the presence of the three divine Persons, which will convert us to live immersed in the ocean of sanctifying grace, always following the path pointed out for us by the light of the Word of God. And it is thus that the love of God is manifested in us, transforming us and identifying us with the three divine Persons through our complete union with Jesus Christ.

Hence, it is love that transforms us into living temples of the Most Holy Trinity, because God is love and communicates to us the life of this love, which is the life of God in us – *“I will reveal myself to him”* (Jn. 14:21)– it is the life of Christ in us.

It is true that keeping the Word of God involves self-denial and renunciation, but it is also true that it is precisely in this self-denial and renunciation that we prove our love to God.

The Passion and Death of Jesus should lead us to reflect on the love that God has for us not only as a community of believers but, as an individual love for each and every one of us. God loves each one of us in a profoundly intimate way.

Christ’s Passion and Death should also lead us to reflect and understand that as disciples who follow Jesus faithfully, we are called and expected to follow Him into dislike, ridicule, even persecution from those who find the Gospel threatening to their ways of thinking, wants, and actions. We must remember Jesus words; *“If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. No slave is greater than his master.”* (Jn 15:18, 20).

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for us to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in order for our piety to be genuine. And in order for this intimate relationship to start or to be rekindled with our Lord, King, and Redeemer, Jesus Christ; we must die to our self-centered attitude and human will.



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As we emerge from being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and begin our Christian life, our ideal is unity with God. This reminds me of a song title *“Now We Remain”*. In the refrain it says, *“We hold the death of the Lord deep in our hearts. Living, now we re-main with Jesus, the Christ.”* And in the fourth verse it says, *“for to live with the Lord, we must die with the Lord.”*

The life of Saint Paul is a perfect example of a mirror by which we can examine the state of our own piety; of our intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul’s encounter with Jesus was one that enabled him to realize the enormous love that God had for him, and made him encounter himself, a meeting of the self which made him realize the sinfulness, powerlessness, and nothingness that he was. It is only through this encounter with the Lord Jesus that caused Paul to realize that nothing else mattered but discerning and obeying God’s Will.

To God, the darkest depths of the human heart are as clear as the page of a book lying open in the sunlight. He knows us through and through – and loves us as deeply as He knows us. So, rather than hiding from Him, let us put our life into the One whose Hands fashioned us, and allow Him to lead us on the path of life eternal; in the wake of Christ our Lord.

It is through an intimate relationship with Jesus that we will experience the forgiveness and love of God.

It is through an intimate relationship with Jesus that we will be able to surrender our will, and trust; and be obedient to God and thus become true disciples to our Master Jesus Christ.

It is though an intimate relationship with Jesus that our entire personality will be transformed and turned inside out as we surrender our will and let Jesus light the recesses of our soul.

If we do not go through this realization of our nothingness and daily reflection of our Lord’s Passion, Death and Resurrection, it will be very easy for us to fall into a false belief; thinking that through our own efforts we are capable of living a pious life.



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We can thus say that true piety is allowing God to love us, as we are, and to respond to God’s love by allowing our Lord Jesus Christ to make of our heart a loving heart because He dwells in us. It is to say that Christ loves through us, with us, and in us.

Jesus, our Savior, true God and true man, must be the ultimate end of all our other devotions; otherwise they would be false and misleading. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of everything. *“For this I labor and struggle,”* says Saint Paul, *“that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”* (Col. 1-28-29)

For in Him alone dwells the entire fullness of the divinity and the complete fullness of grace, virtue, and perfection. In Him alone we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing; He is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should actualize.

He is the Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can make us conscious and ever-growing in grace. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires.

We are given no other name under heaven by which we can be saved. God has laid no other foundation for our salvation, perfection, and glory than Jesus. Every structure which is not built on that firm rock is founded upon shifting sands and will certainly fall sooner or later. Every one of the faithful who is not united to Him is like a branch broken from the stem of the vine. It falls and withers and is fit only to be burnt. If we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us, we need not fear anything.

Neither angels in heaven nor men on earth, nor devils in hell, no creature whatsoever can harm us, for no creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Through Him, with Him, and in Him, we can do all things; rendering all honor and glory to God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we can make ourselves perfect and be for our neighbor a perfume of eternal life.

Each hour of our life should project little by little a living, normal, and present Jesus Christ. The heart of the Good News is



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that God though Jesus Christ loves us, like Saint Paul expressed; *“the son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (Gal. 2:20) *“God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.”* (Gal. 4:6) *“For to me to live is Christ!”* (Philippians 1:21)

This is why it is essential for us not to only do pious things; morning prayers, daily mass, rosary, etc., but to incarnate these pious exercises into our very selves in order for them to be Christ who prays, Christ who goes to Mass, Christ who prays the rosary etc., through us, with us, and in us.

In the Piety Rollo, holiness is defined as “the direction of one’s whole life to God.” Direction implies a way, a path, a vision, a definite place towards which we are heading and one’s whole life is directed to God. We do not compartmentalize our faith. We cannot give God only part of us. It has to be all or nothing if our conversion is to remain valid. Remember the caricatures of spirituality described in the Piety Rollo; Sanctimonious, Practitioners and Pharisees. The problem with false piety is that our spiritual life becomes nothing more than an appearance and a self-centered personality.

Directing our whole life toward God – a meeting with a loving, personal God revealed to us through Jesus Christ – involves, first of all, knowing Jesus Christ. Knowing Jesus means more than knowing about Him. This cannot happen unless we encounter Him personally. The goal of all our human action is to actualize Christ in order to be a channel of God’s love toward all people we encounter so that they may say; *“I believe because I have met Christ personally. He has touched my heart”*. This is knowledge of Christ imparted by Christ Himself, not through mere human words and actions. People must see beyond us to Christ and must come to terms with Him on their own. Sharing our Life in Christ with our friends will enable them through the grace of God to encounter themselves and be in disposition to encounter a conversion. We must remember that metanoia can only happen with a change of heart and that change of heart cannot happen if Christ is reduced to doctrine or a system of belief.

We direct our whole life toward Christ by loving Him. In order to truly love Him, we must be in love with Him. When we are truly in love with Christ, then He becomes the focus of all our thoughts and



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actions. We must be careful not to claim to be in love with God simply because we are addicted with the feeling of being religious or spiritual. This is not the same thing as being in love with God. When we are in love with the feeling of being in love, then our piety is reduced to a “high” or the “warm feeling we get inside” but, God is not just a warm fuzzy feeling. To be in love with God means being in love through thick or thin. It means working on our relationship with Him and not taking Him for granted.

Directing our whole life toward God means following Christ and to follow Christ is more than following an idea, a philosophy or a doctrine. Following Christ means devoting our life to the person of Christ. Jesus said, “*Follow me*”, not “*Follow my doctrine.*” Metanoia is not a conversion to a system, philosophy or message, but a turning of our minds and hearts completely to God. Saint Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:17, “*May Christ find a dwelling place in your heart by faith*”. Following Christ does often bring us great glory and benefits. Not the worldly kind, but the kind that bears fruit for our eternal life. At the same time, following Christ is not always easy and often very uncomfortable. Christ tells Saint Peter in John 21 that he will someday go where he would not choose. Our life in Christ will often take us down roads that we could never imagine, but even when the road is difficult, it is worth the effort to travel it.

However, sometimes we think that once we direct our life toward Christ that we should be set for life. This is not the case. Many who encounter Him today will lose what they found down the road. Many of us have seen many Cursillistas experience a tremendous conversion on their Cursillo. They get on fire and start doing all kinds of apostolic works, immerse themselves in their Fourth Day – and then one day it all goes away. How can we lose something so wonderful so easily?

Unfortunately, the answer to that question is real and sad. If we consider that an authentic conversion really is a total surrender from our old ways and embracing the love of God, then we must conclude that in order to lose this life of Holiness so easily, we could not have embraced it in the first place. Can we really turn toward God completely and then seriously give it all up? Give it up for what, when there is nothing better than an intimate relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ.



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When we speak of a conversion, it must include the whole enchilada. However, sometimes we take what looks good and discard the rest. It cannot be that way with Christ. Our daily circumstances and situations are always a part of our Life in Grace. Following Christ is not easy but, in order to keep the love of God alive in us, we must always be renewing ourselves. This is why Group Reunion and Ultreya are so essential where we share of piety, study, and action. If we try to live the Life in Christ alone and on our terms, we are doomed for failure. Without a daily renewal of our initial conversion, the love for the Lord will quickly vanish.

Saint John of the Cross describes the third and final stage of the spiritual life as the Unitive Stage. The image he uses is the image of the log and the fire. A log (the soul) is thrown on to the fire (God) and eventually the log is consumed by the fire and the fire burns brightly. That is what our conversion to Christ is like. We become consumed by God’s Love and are fully alive in Him.

However, when we abandon a genuine life of piety, our Life in Christ vanishes, but if we are conscious of our internal tripod; piety, study and action we see that they are the logs that keep our intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ burning. This is what the Fourth Day is all about – not giving us momentary highs, but giving us something that will sustain us and keep the love of God burning for all time until we meet God face to face.

Directing our whole life toward God is part of a progressive conversion, which keeps the fire going by continuing to fuel the fire with acts of piety, study, and surrendering to God’s will, which in turn, He through Jesus Christ those God’s apostolic work with each person that we encounter in our God-giving environments.

Many people who have abandoned the Christian Ideal in their Fourth Day have done so because they have stopped living a genuine pious life and in many cases the question is asked, “What happened to So and So?, we find out that they stopped relying on the mercy and love of our heavenly Father, Abba.

As I mentioned earlier, that a genuine pious life involves being “in love” with our Lord, King, and Redeemer Jesus Christ. This relationship will enable us to love God with our whole mind, heart,



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and will, which will keep our baptism candle of faith alive in our hearts.

At this point, we may echo the words that Christ said through our Patron Saint; Saint Paul, who said *“It’s no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.”* (Gal. 2:20) Our heart will love like Christ and will be open to allow us to put on the mind of Christ (study) and in time our action, our attitude, and our human will, will be consumed by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and all our human acts will be the act of the Divine Will.

Always De Colores!

