

HEARTBEATS – Staying Connected

6/28/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, June 29 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for the Little Learner's Exploration Academy at St. Andrew, especially as the begin offering infant and toddler care. Pray for the staff who care for the children. Pray for the parents who entrust their children to LLEA. And pray for the safety and education of these little learners.

Recently, I wrote about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops deciding to move forward with a process that would call into question the eligibility of politicians to receive Holy Communion if they personally disagree with a doctrine of the church. Their action emphasizes the importance of understanding what the sacraments are and what they are not. It also stresses the distinction between the theological and the political.

Martin Luther inadvertently started the Protestant Reformation over the difference between the theological and the financial. In his day, the Roman Catholic church was selling indulgences—church authorized documents that conveyed God's forgiveness for a contribution of money. This was to raise funds for the continued building of a cathedral in Rome. Luther strongly objected to this for several reasons: 1) This practice made forgiveness was more readily available to those who were wealthier and could afford to buy the indulgences. 2) While the church is called by God and has the responsibility to announce forgiveness, this does not give it the authority to sell God's mercy. 3) Most of all, God's love is a free gift with no strings attached that is received solely through faith in God and not through any other means.

In the same way, God's grace—forgiveness received through faith—is not something that is earned or achieved by supporting a doctrinal position of the church. More than that, focusing specifically on how politicians who are members of a denomination vote or speak on a church policy, and then granting God's grace received through the sacraments based on those personal views makes the sacraments a tool for manipulating political

support. The sacraments are gifts from God, given to those whom God loves. And frankly, that is everyone. The church is given the responsibility by God to share God's love, communicated through the sacraments, on behalf of God. If God offers forgiveness to all who come, the church must uphold God's wishes and share the sacrament with all.

You see, the sacraments in and of themselves demonstrate the relationship we have with God. It is not we, but God who creates that relationship. In Holy Baptism, God adopts us (Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:15). In other words, God chooses us and makes us part of God's family. Like the infant or small child who is adopted, we have no say in that choosing. We can reject it and turn from it, but we can not make it happen, nor do we have to do anything to become worthy of it. The way I like to say it is: In Holy Baptism, God says, "You are mine."

Holy Communion sort of completes the circle. While Holy Baptism is once and for all—God chooses us and we will always be welcome in God's family, even if we reject it, but then later return. Holy Communion though is the ongoing reminder to us of that relationship begun at Holy Baptism. In Holy Communion, God gives Godself to us (Matthew 26:26-28). Every time we come to the Lord's Table and receive what God gives to us (again given, not earned) we get to hear the other half of that circle: In Holy Communion, God says, "I am yours."

The sacraments are gifts from God and do not have to be and should not be seen to be something to be earned. They are the signs of God's love for us, even when we fail to be the people God wants us to be. And God always, always loves us, even if we disagree with a position taken by the church. (I think Jesus even did that a few times. Of course, look where that got Him.) The bottom line is that the church and all of us for that matter are to know, first of all that we are dearly love by God, and second, that we are to share this good news with all others in whatever way we can.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey