

"Master, what must I do to gain eternal life?" C

A man was returning from a revival in his pickup after attending a meeting. He was still pondering the sermon on Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine when the local sheriff ordered him to pull over. Acting on a tip that an illegal still was being operated in the area, the sheriff looked at the man's truck and saw 12 jugs filled to the brim. "What's in those jugs" he asked. And the man said, "Oh that's fresh spring water. My wife and I drink nothing but spring water". "I don't mean to doubt your word, but I'll have to taste it" said the sheriff. Whereupon he took a drink and the liquid burned his tongue and throat. "That's not spring water, that's whiskey" he coughed. To which the man replied, "Praise the Lord, he's done it gain."

Jesus is ready and willing to perform a miracle of transformation in our life, if we will let him. Any genuine encounter with Jesus means change. It makes a difference in the way we live. It makes a difference in the kind of people we are. We cannot encounter God's grace thru Jesus Christ and still go on in the same selfish way, the same insensitive, unloving manner. If there is no change, no matter how good it may feel, the religious experience is itself violated and contradicted.

If we go back to the Israelites in the time of Moses we find a people encountering God, first in the Exodus and then in

2  
desert journey to the promised land. Moses comes to them and literally lays down the law, saying: "This is the way you will live because of your encounter with God" The OT prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Miah, Hosea, Amos - all of them pick up the same theme. They see the people of God living in disobedience and they try to warn them! "You are God's people. Live that way. If you do not there will be a terrible price to pay. You will suffer in your estrangement from God".

Then Jesus comes and bring it all to a climax. He preaches "gospel" good news, about God's love and the reign of God. But he says time and time again, in different ways: "You will be able to identify the persons who are living under the reign of God by the fruit of their lives"

f When we experience the Christ spirit moving within us we are born again to new life and want to respond tangibly. The words are not enough" "Yes, God, I love you, I praise you, I thank you" We want to be doers of the Word. The transforming power of divine grace changes our minds, changes our hearts, changes our will, and Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us is transformed into an irrersistible invitation.

In her autobiography, "This I Believe" Helen Hayes, tells the moving story hf how the trandorming power of God affected her life in a time of deep distress:

When my daughter died of polio, everybody stretched out a and to help me, but at first I couldn't seem to bear the touch of anything, even the love of rriends, no support seemed strong

3  
enough.

While Mary was still sick, I used to go early in the morning to a little church near the hospital to pray. There the working people came quietly to worship. I had been careless with my religion, I had rather cut God out of my life, and I didn't have the nerve at the time of ask him to make my daughter well. I only asked him to help me understand, to let me come in and reach him. I prayed there every morning and I kept looking for a revelation, but nothing happened.

Then, much later, I discovered that it had happened, right there in the church. I could recall, vividly, one-by-one, the people I had seen there — the solemn laborers with tired looks, the old women with gnarled hands. Life had knocked them around, but for a brief moment they were being refreshed by an ennobling experience. It seemed, as they prayed, their worn faces lighted up and they became vessels of God. Here was my revelation. Suddenly I realized I was one of them. In my need I gained strength from the knowledge that they too had need, and I felt an interdependence with them. I experienced a flood of compassion for people. I was learning the meaning of "Love thy neighbor".

In today's gospel lesson, Jesus clearly defines the meaning of "love thy neighbor" for a lawyer — a man disciplined in the art of strict definition. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life" the lawyer asks. Whereupon Jesus tells him to look at the religious law for his answer. And he recites the law:

You shall love the Lord your God  
with all your heart,  
with all your soul,  
with all your strength,

and with all your mind;  
and your neighbor as yourself"

Then, then man insists on a definition of terms. "And who is my neighbor?" he asks. Jesus answers with a parable - a practical illustration so clear in its meaning that it leaves little opening for cross-examination. ~~The~~ In the parable, as you know, a man travelling along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is mugged by a band of robbers. He is stripped, beaten and left half-dead. A temple official comes along, sees the distressed man, but does nothing. A second religious man comes along and, like the first, looks at the helpless victim and passes him by. Then along comes a Samaritan, a man whom the religious leaders would hold in contempt as a enemy, an outcast, a member of an inferior minorit, The Samaritan sees the victim and is "moved to pity at the sight" Jesus says. He approaches the wounded man, dresses his wounds, and takes him to an inn where he tends him thru the night. The next day he gives the innkeeper money with instructions to look after him. "If there is any further expense I will repay you on the way back" he says. Having spoke the parable, Jesus asks the lawyer for an opinion: "Which of these 3 was nieghbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer answers, "The one who treated him with compassior". To which Jesus replies "Then go and do the same". Clear as a picture. No further questions. Case closed.

"Teacher, what must we do to inherit everlasting life?"

"Teacher, what is everlasting life?" Jesus is taking us beyond our pie-in-the-sky answer to that question. He is telling us that God Almighty, in his infinite wisdom, is here and now offering you a glimpse into eternal life. Our everlasting life has already begun. It is in progress now. God is providing us now with endless opportunities to discover who we are and why we are. God is providing us now with the answer to our deep longing for fulfillment as a human person: "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself" says the OT law.

And Jesus says "I have come to fulfill the law..... The command I give you is this, that you love one another." Jesus expresses his love for other persons always within the broader context of his love for the Father! "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way the Father knows me and I know the Father; for these sheep I will give my life". In the first Epistle of John it is written! "...How can God's love survive in a man who has enough of this world's good yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need?" In other words, love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable.

In the Old "Amos and Andy" radio series, there is a big man who greeted Andy with a slap across the chest whenever they met. In one episode Andy tells Amos: "I put a stick of dynamite

6  
under my vest, and the next time that big man slaps me he is going to get his hand blown off". Andy didn't stop to thin that when the big man's hand was blown off his own heart would be blown out. Some things cannot be separated: Love of God is not possible without love of neighbor.

If you want to deepen your understanding of everlasting life here and now, If you want to discover the human glimpse God is offering you of eternity, if you want to experience a miracle of transformation in your life, simply take your neighbor's hand in yours and offer him or her your loving heart. And here yourself saying: "praise the Lord..... He's done it again".