

# Equipping the Saints

"....it is quite possible to have mystical experiences and yet not attain to a true knowledge of God, since the knowledge of God consists in the perfection of love in our lives." So says Stephen C. Kroeger, MA, in "Orthodoxy, Reality and Holiness". He says, "The road to holiness, to freedom, begins with coming to know God's will, through divine revelation, and through the arduous work of discipleship." Revelation and discipleship? Hmm, interesting. Basilian Father Thomas Rosica's advent reflection was entitled 'The Path of Holiness Goes through the Desert.' Hmm. It seems there is no escaping the truth that holiness and perfect love are hard earned, yet we are all called to it!

Now that I have told you, you cannot pretend you didn't know! I have more news: holiness is the only way to heaven so we had better find out just what it is, don't you think? It is doing the will of God and it is God's will that we learn to love. That's it, you ask, that's all it is, just love people? Correct! And God, and you! That's eternal life in the Kingdom of God. We will have to be holy as God is holy, which means we will love perfectly. Wow! And, where do you suppose the process begins? When you die? No, that will be too late. It starts right here, and if we don't get it done before we die we have the privilege of completing it in purgatory, which believe me, is really good news! Without that, most of us would be goners!

We giggle and we wriggle when we think that we will all be saints one day, but it is the truth. There are no other people in heaven! That is their name, just as here we are called sinners. It is just a name for people who chose to leave the world system to love and serve Jesus first and foremost in life. The great saints do it all more dramatically than ordinary mortals, according to the gifts God gave them, but it applies to all of us. You wanna go to heaven you gotta become a saint! We cannot enter without being holy, which means being totally without sin, in other words, being in perfect love. I don't know about you but it seems more appealing to learn to love than to try to get rid of sin. Yes? Since love covers a multitude of sins, it's worth taking a look at how it works.

We have learned that love is challenged and honed in all the hard places of life. We only have to look at the Cross, or the lives of Jesus and Mary to get that. And life itself presents a rocky road so we don't have to go looking for adversity. That's a good thing. We have trouble getting along with others because 'they' need so much healing, right? Do you know what will heal them? Love! Lots of it. And what about us? Most of our hard places are buried inside us where we hid them. Let anyone come near with healing love and truth and we grab our fig leaves and head for the hills of disillusionment, in full flight, in order to protect ourselves. We run from love. We live empty, futile lives grasping at sinking straws to stop from drowning in our lost, lonely pain. Jesus wants to heal us and he heals us with love but we don't believe that so we hide or run. We are afraid of punishment when he assures us that there is no punishment here on earth. False pride drives us into fear of what we will find out about ourselves so we lash out, defensively, and miss love again. Fear is the opposite of love. To be full of fear is to be empty of love and love is the one thing without which we cannot live. We need to learn to fill one another with the right stuff so that we become a family without dysfunction. That love will get us into heaven. We have work to do, don't you agree?

The truth is love. Resistance to the truth will hurt. Lies hurt. We hate them, yet we lie to each other all the time, so as not to 'hurt feelings'. How can that be when we are agreed that lies hurt? Then, we call it 'loving'. Really? That's love? Or, is it fear not to be popular? We haven't learned, yet, to speak the truth in love, perhaps. The truth works every time in every situation if it is coming from a heart of love. That's holy love.

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We throw the word 'love' around like confetti, and that's fine, but it's not what I'm talking about. I am not talking about what Fr. Ed Wade consistently calls "The Love Boat"! I am talking holy love, right? So, what is that, then? It comes from the gut for the good of all. It is truth. It stands firm. It is honed, like tempered steel, balanced, wearing the same face for all. It is something you are, not something you do, although loving deeds are all that can come from it. It is active, not passive, it is passionate not docile, it is Mary, it is Jesus, it is God, it is us as we will be. Mary continued to love as she matured, remaining in pure love within herself, every day in every way, every word, every thought, every deed, consciously reaching for excellence, not to be mistaken for perfection. That is holiness, that is perfected love, that is our goal. That's what makes saints.

So, how do we do it? God says that with him all things are possible. The people in our lives, all of them, were sent to us with a purpose. They are there to teach us to love. It is not an option; it is God's will. When you fail, cry out for holy love to fill you, look for the best *until you find it* in any situation. Inner instant repentance and forgiveness are your best friends every time you fail to be kind, generous, helpful and attentive to the needs of the other before your own, whether you be boss or slave, male or female, friend or foe. It has to become sincere from the heart and it is the hardest thing you will ever have to do, day in and day out. Everything can be said kindly and respectfully, no matter how distasteful, but it doesn't always come easy to us. You will die to yourself as you rail against it but it will make a saint out of you, and isn't that the point?

And, what's more, look at the benefits: a happy, peaceful, joy-filled life here and now as we love our way to Paradise. That's a win-win! Allelujah!

Elizabeth Pringle

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