

Who are you?

There was an article that came out in the news on Dec 24, 2018 last year about a priest Miguel Ibarra who had been doing ministry in Colombia and then moved to Spain in 2017 to continue his ministry. A complaint had been filed against this man and after 18 years of priesthood, it was discovered that this man was never a real priest at all. 18 years of confessions, eucharists, baptisms etc. Fortunately his baptisms and weddings were considered valid but not his masses or confessions.

This is a shocking example but it led me to ask myself: are you what you say you are?

That is what living with integrity means: I am who I say I am. This is more than just a focus on externals and having appropriate and real credentials. Even if I was validly ordained a priest, am I who I say I am in season and out of season, in the light and in the dark?

This pertains to us Christians as well: am I who I say I am? Am I a true Christian, a follower and disciple of Christ not just at Church or bible studies but also at home, at work?

Someone who lives with integrity, whose identity coincides with their actions, is the type of person that Jesus talks about today: "those who do what is true come to the light so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." A person of integrity lives with a clean conscience and lives in freedom. They are not afraid of their actions because they have done them in the presence of God, in his light.

However, sometimes we experience moments when we are not living with integrity, when our actions contradict our identity and so we can experience a kind of fear: "all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light so that their deeds may not be exposed."

For many of us, we do not fall into either category perfectly. We do not always walk perfectly in the light nor do we love hiding in the darkness all the time. Most of us are in this third category where we want to love the light yet we live in the darkness. We live in this dis-integration but we are longing for integration, to live with integrity.

Many of us are like St. Paul who says: "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rm 7:15, 24).

We toss and turn with all of our own efforts to try to change our hearts but sometimes it does not seem to work. We've tried everything yet we still feel captive to sin! Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? But what does St. Paul say?

Thanks be to Jesus Christ our Lord!

It is Jesus who saves us. See God knew that the problem with sin dwelt right in our hearts and that he would have to renew it in order to equip us to live as citizens in heaven. In other words, he was not just going to patch up our old wineskins with new pieces here and there because then the new wine would burst the skins. God wanted to give us new wineskins so that our new hearts can hold the new wine of his grace.

This is what God reveals to us through the prophet Ezekiel: A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

Today as we all strive to live a life of integrity based on the words of Jesus, let us realize that we cannot do it on our own, that we tend to gravitate toward the sinful tendencies in our hearts. When we receive the Eucharist today, ask the Lord to come into our stone cold hearts and replace it with a heart of flesh, a new wineskin, so that we can be who we say we are, so that we can live with integrity.