

Every Christian's Battle Plan
Homily for Easter 6
May 8-9th 2021

As we come closer to Pentecost and the end of the Easter season, the Church brings us back to the Last Supper with today's Gospel passage. Think about the setting. The moment is solemn. Jesus is at table with his intimate friends, his handpicked Twelve Apostles. He knows that this is the last time they will be gathered in this way until they meet again after the Resurrection. Nothing is carelessly said. Everyone on their deathbed has their final words, their legacy: these are the Lord's final words. Jesus explains that he has loved us, and that he longs for us to remain in his love, to stay in his friendship, so that we may experience the indescribable joy that flows from true love. And then he lays down his New Commandment, the summary of all his teaching and of his entire life: "love one another as I love you." The Ten Commandments of the Old Testament were summarized by Jesus during his public life in two commandments of the New Testament: Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. But now, at the climax of his earthly mission, Jesus combines those two into a final, New Commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

This is the Christian battle plan. For you see, at the Last Supper, Jesus was on the verge of his final battle against evil and all the forces of darkness. And the Church he is forming through his Apostles will take that same battle to the ends of the earth and to every corner of human history and culture. The plan is so simple and straightforward, summed up in this single, final, definitive command: love one another as I have loved you

When we think of this Battle Plan it ties in clearly with the other reading from St. John we heard today, where this pastor declares "God is love". Love is not an attribute of God. No, it expresses the fullness of what it is to be God. Love

We are Christ's soldiers. St Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians about are weapons when he writes:

for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds¹

There is something about the weapons of love that always inspired the saints who exemplify amazing things that can happen when normal Christians really do their best to put this battle plan into action.

St Crispin of Viterbo is a prime example.

He was a Capuchin friar who lived in Italy in the 1700s. He held many unglamorous posts in the monastery during his 57 years as a friar - cook, gardener, handy man. For the majority of his life, however, he was "questor". Being questor entailed going on daily begging trips around the Orvieto in order to gather basic necessities for the monks, and also for the poor and sick who were under the monastery's care. He began his daily tours with heartfelt prayer, and accompanied

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (2 Co 10:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

them with an ongoing interior conversation with the Virgin Mary, with whom he had a close relationship.

This daily begging duty put him in contact with everyone in town. He got to know all the families, all the feuds, all the needs, all the talents - everything. And he took advantage of this unique position to work full-time as a peacemaker. While he would ask them for physical donations, he would give them spiritual donations: helping people solve their problems, mediating disputes, and ironing out antipathies. He even courageously chided greedy merchants, called corrupt politicians to task, and stirred the consciences of luxury-loving, powerful aristocrats. Gradually his work helped to transform Orvieto, spreading a true spirit of Christ-like love. This humble beggar, simply by following Christ's battle plan, ended up becoming, for all practical purposes, the town mayor, police chief, pastor, and lawyer, all rolled into one. His begging filled the mouths and clothed the backs of the friars and the poor and the orphans, and his peacemaking filled with Christian joy the hearts of those with whom he met.

If Christ's battle plan is for us to love others, to give of ourselves for the benefit of others, just as he did for us, then we need to ask ourselves a question: What is the very best thing I can do for my neighbor? The answer, learning to see them from God's perspective. From a merely human perspective, we tend to look at our relationships in terms of what we get out of them.

- This person is enjoyable to be around;
- This person rubs me the wrong way;
- This person is always asking favors...

But when we understand that the path to true wisdom and lasting joy is Christ-like love, self-forgetful, self-giving love, those considerations begin to take a back seat.

- When we are self-centered, we tend to be passive and reactive.
- But when we are Christ-centered, we tend to be proactive.
- We see relationships in terms of what we can give to them, and that's much more dynamic and energizing.

Imagine starting the week by making a list of things you want to do for people. It could help to change the whole tone of our week; we would be lighting lights instead of dodging shadows.

This week:

- think of one small thing you can do to ease the burdens of your spouse;
- think of one small thing you can do to make your boss's or coworker's job just a little bit easier;
- think of one small thing you can do to bring some encouragement and joy into your parents' lives;
- think of a friend or relative who is suffering, and think of one small thing you can do to help support them.

This is what self-giving looks like in real life. It is within all of our reach, if we are willing to step out of our comfort zones. Jesus did it for us on the wood of the cross, today, this week, let's promise to do it for him on the pavement of our daily lives and by so doing we will advance the Battle plan of Love given as the last words of the one who is love before he stretched out his hands for on the cross.