

Today we remember St. John XXIII who was Canonized along with St. John Paul II in 2014.

Although he took his work very seriously, St John XXIII didn't take himself too seriously. His wit soon became proverbial after his election in 1958. He was known as "Good Pope John".

At his address at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, he criticized the "prophets of doom" who "in these modern times see nothing but deception and ruin." Pope John XXIII set a tone for the Council when he said, "The Church has always opposed... errors. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity."

St. John understood that the Church was at a Cross Roads. The Second Vatican Council was called so that Church would better understand how to engage a rapidly changing world with the never changing Gospel.

He understood the theme at the heart of today's readings. Religious practice when devoid of the Holy Spirit becomes legalistic and ritualistic.

The Pharisees who invited Jesus for dinner in today's Gospel were preoccupied with outward rituals, like the ceremonial washing of hands. So preoccupied were they with the exterior practices that their interior lives were far from God. So Jesus says, "Give alms for the things that are within, and everything will be clean for you."

In other words our life with God is about the interior life primarily and not ritualistic observances.

St. Paul was addressing the same thing in this evening reading from Galatians. There were those in the Galatian Church who believed that the legalistic practice of circumcision was required in order to become a Christian. But when legalism takes the place of grace, we cut ourselves off from Christ and fall away from grace.

However when we give priority to the interior life of the Holy Spirit then we discover faith working through love. The Church that is vital and dynamic is the Church that takes the interior life of transformation as what is most important. Grace working through love.

It was this theme John XXIII wanted to permeate the Catholic Church. It has been a difficult time since the Council because so often those within the Church were more influenced by the culture than by the documents of the council. But over time the fruit of the Council is finding expression in the Church. We are discovering how important it is to

remember "The Church has always opposed... errors. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity."

Faith working through love is what always revives the Church so that our tendency toward legalism and ritualism are checked. When the Church is primarily concerned with outward rituals and legalisms, the Holy Spirit is stifled and the Church cannot be an authentic witness. When she is discovering interior renewal than these words of John XXIII can guide us:

Consult not your fears, but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations but about your unfulfilled potential... Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do!