

Homily for October 16th 2018

Imagine if every time you got in your car, you consulted a big, heavy book that explained the many rules of the road. That would make driving pretty difficult, wouldn't it? As it is, you already know the traffic laws. You probably even know the unwritten rules of driving etiquette. In fact, if you've been driving for any length of time, most of these laws have become instinctive.¹

The Galatian Christians were dealing with a similar issue. Paul warned that they were taking their observance of the Law of Moses to an unhealthy extreme, as was expressed through their requirement that all in their community undergo circumcision.

This was rite of cutting away the foreskin from the male generative organ, performed on Jewish boys on their eighth day of life. In Israel, circumcision was not just a surgical procedure; it was primarily a religious rite. It was a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:10), and no man could belong to God's covenant people without being circumcised.

Circumcision was so important because it was an outward sign of something deeper; the obedience of Israel to God's covenant. It was a permanent reminder that Israel had a unique responsibility. "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart,"

The spiritual significance of circumcision was the key to the Christian understanding of the rite. Most Gentiles at that time were not circumcised; in most of the Roman world, circumcision was an exclusively Jewish practice. Some Jewish Christians insisted that "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Paul, who had begun his mission to the Gentiles, "had no small dissension and debate with them" (Acts 15:2).

It was this attitude towards circumcision Paul addressed most directly in Galatians where there was a strong insistence on Gentile circumcision. They had lost sight of the fact that through his cross and resurrection, Jesus had fulfilled the just requirements of the Law. Circumcision was no

¹ <https://wau.org/meditations/>

longer necessary; what was necessary instead was “faith working through love,” the evidence of a life transformed by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:6).

How easy it is for us to separate the act from what it is to represent. People can choose baptism, or even participation in the Mass as a fulfilling of a Christian obligation without it effecting true conversion of heart. This is what Jesus saw with the Pharisees of his day. Their lives exemplified religious zeal focused on the exterior practices that often failed to penetrate to the heart.²

When we think of the Saints of the Church they are those people who never tired of the faith’s outward devotions, but understood they were too always aid inner conversion.

On December 9th, 1990 thousands of North Americans converged on St. Peter’s to celebrate the canonization of Marguerite d’Youville (1701–1771), the first Canadian-born saint. Marguerite d’Youville was an 18th century Mother Teresa who dedicated her life and work to the poor, the ill and the destitute. Pope John XXIII called Marguerite d’Youville the “Mother of Universal Charity” at her beatification ceremony in 1959 for the sacrifices she made to alleviate the suffering of the less fortunate.

She is someone in whom faith worked through love as today’s Collect beautifully expressed:

God of mercy and compassion who led Saint Marquerite dYouville to embrace the way of the Cross and to devote her ardent love to assist the needy of her day. Make us bold, like her, we pray so that we may imitate your own compassion and have the strength to persevere to that day you call us to share the joy of the saints.

² Mitch, C. (2010). [Introduction to the Gospels](#). In *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (p. 131). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.