

The world loves heroes! And the world *especially* loves *superheroes*, like the Hulk, Superman, Thor, etc. The world's deep love of heroes and superheroes is evidenced by the massive success of Marvel and DC Comics and more recently all the Marvel movies, whose storylines have culminated in the newly released blockbuster, *Avengers: Infinity War*. Now I'm not a big comic book fan, but I've definitely enjoyed the Marvel movies and I'm looking forward to seeing *Avengers: Infinity War* with my family next week.

But how would we define or identify a "hero"? What makes someone a hero? Superheroes are pretty easy to identify because of their supernatural or special powers and the fact that they're fictional characters. Well for one, I think many would say that a "hero" is someone who is brave and courageous. And yet there are many other aspects of heroism that I think we overlook or may take for granted.

For example, heroes are considered brave and courageous *precisely* because they stand out among the crowd and are willing to do something that others are either *not* willing to do or simply unable to do. Heroes don't choose the "easy way out." Rather they're not afraid to do

what's hard and difficult. Heroes are courageous and brave because they don't do what's popular. Heroes don't go along with the crowd—they're not popular conformists. Rather heroes swim against the prevailing currents and do what is objectively right and morally good. Heroes are not empty talk—they are people of action, meaning that they actually "walk the walk." Heroes live in accordance with what our Lord tells us today in the second reading from the First Letter of St. John: "Children, let us love *not in word or speech*, but in deed and truth."

Heroes understand that actions speak louder than words.

Heroes are courageous, virtuous risk-takers in that they're willing to selflessly take risks for the sake of truth, goodness, and love.

Selflessness and sacrifice, motivated by a sincere love, humility, and virtue, are the hallmarks of heroism. Generally speaking, heroism is diverse in that there are small, hidden acts of heroism and then there are larger, more public acts of heroism. Certainly, over the years in our world and in our country, we've heard countless stories in the news of how people have selflessly risked and sacrificed their very lives for others in the midst of suffering, tragedy, and horrible events and we

would certainly consider those individuals to be heroes, especially given the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Who said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Brothers and sisters, the Catholic Church has a synonym for heroes—they’re called saints. One could even say that saints are “superheroes” in that while they don’t have special powers like the fictional Spiderman, Thor, or the Hulk, they’re actual, real people who are filled with *supernatural* divine life called “grace” which enables them to *live as Christ lives* and *to love as He loves*. In fact, *all of us*, by virtue of our baptism, have received this same supernatural, divine life called grace, which makes us adopted children of God and enables us to follow our Lord Jesus by living a life a genuine love and holiness.

In today’s Gospel, our Lord Jesus speaks to the heroism of discipleship—the heroism of “bearing fruit” and following Him. Now what does Jesus mean when He says that we’re called “to bear fruit”? He simply means that we’re called to live our Catholic faith through a life that’s defined by love and virtue—a life that radiates holiness! Holiness, which may be defined as an intimacy with Christ that

manifests itself through a life of love and virtue, is the greatest fruit we can bear as disciples of Jesus!

Because brothers and sisters, what's the point of *being* Catholic if we're not actually going to *live the fullness* of our Catholic faith through our thoughts, words, and actions? And the key there is *actions*.

Thoughts, words, and faith are all cheap and meaningless if they're not manifested by actions—by actual deeds of love and virtue—by how we treat Christ and others. Dare I say by how we humbly obey Christ and His Church in matters of faith and morals.

In an increasingly secular world, where self-centered hedonism and moral relativism are rampant—a world that's more and more hostile to organized religion and openly mocks Christians and anyone who lovingly strives for holiness in fidelity to Christ and His Church: living the Catholic faith, especially in public, is nothing short of heroic.

It's heroic when a student in junior high or high school goes against the crowd and stands up for the victim of bullying or befriends the kid that everybody mocks and avoids. It's heroic when a married couple is humbly and lovingly open to the gift of life, the gift of

children, without trying to selfishly reject that gift in any way. It's heroic when a young man or a young woman strives to be chaste and pure and save themselves for Holy Matrimony in the midst of a popular culture that ridicules virtuous self-control and screams "do whatever makes you feel good!" or "everyone's doing it!" It's heroic when a mother and a father make great personal sacrifices in order to lovingly care for their disabled child. It's heroic when a young woman facing an unplanned pregnancy embraces the life of her child and seeks the best possible life for that child. It's heroic when someone embraces a homeless person on the street when everyone else just walks by in distrust and suspicion.

Brothers and sisters, we can't live our Catholic faith, we can't bear fruit without depending *entirely* on Christ—on the supernatural grace that He pours out to us *in and through* His Catholic Church. Jesus tells today us pretty clearly and unambiguously: "...*without me you can do nothing.*" In others words, without Christ we're too weak on our own. And so just as a young child must depend on their mother and father for everything, so *also must we depend on Christ for everything*—for all of

the supernatural grace that we need to love as He loves and to do good and avoid evil. “Remaining in Jesus” means staying close to Him through prayer, the sacraments, and good spiritual reading, all of which should be undergirded by an unwavering faith, hope, and love.

So brothers and sisters, yes, the world loves heroes. But more importantly, the world *needs* heroes. The superheroes of comic books and movies might be great entertainment, but ultimately they’re not real. On the contrary, our Lord Jesus, Who *is* Real, *is the King of Heroes*—He is the *Heroes of heroes* Who shows us and teaches us how to be heroic. The Avengers might be really cool, but they have absolutely *nothing* on our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the world needs real heroes who are real human beings, willing to *stand out* and fearlessly go against the crowd and be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. In other words, the world needs saints who are not afraid to live their Catholic faith and bear fruit for our Lord Jesus Christ through lives of heroic love and virtue.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is calling us to be heroes—will we answer His call?