

Right now, I want everyone to take a moment and think of the people you love most in your life. Now how would you feel if *those same people* publicly denied you? How would you feel if the people you loved the most in this earthly life publicly renounced you, rejected you, and were ashamed of you? I can't imagine any of us would ever want such a thing to happen and if it did, we would feel horrible about it.

As human beings, we have a natural, instinctive knowledge that authentic love requires fidelity and loyalty. And if we're honest with ourselves, we naturally desire fidelity and loyalty from our family and friends. I'd say in general, nobody really likes back-stabbers. So hopefully by considering these basic truths about innate human desire in relationships, we can understand where our Lord Jesus is coming from in today's Gospel.

At the end of today's Gospel, our Savior declares to us with great clarity: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever *denies me before others*, I will deny before my heavenly Father." Powerful words from our Lord, but who can blame Him for saying this? How can we

realistically expect to live with Christ in Heaven if we selfishly deny Him before others here on earth?

Brothers and sisters, it's simply a fact that in the year 2020, faithful Catholics are being pressured and bullied by many aggressive forces in our society to frankly renounce Christ and His Catholic Church for the sake of conforming to the doctrines of post-modern secular culture, especially those surrounding sexual hedonism. We're constantly being lectured by people that when it comes to Her moral teachings the "Catholic Church has to get with the times!" My knee-jerk response is: Why don't the *times* get with Christ and His Church? Why is it always *Christ and His Church* that have to change and conform to the culture? Why can't the *culture* change and conform to Christ and His Church?

Every time I hear that I think: would we teach children and young people to do this in order to fit in and make friends? I mean seriously, would we teach children and young people to abandon and renounce the goodness of who they are, their virtues, and their Christ-centered values in order to fit in and conform to the crowd? Is popularity and conformity to the crowd really our highest goal in life? Brothers and

sisters, as disciples of Jesus, we're not called to be popular—rather we're called to be faithful. And our fidelity is to **Christ**, Who is Love, Mercy, and Peace Incarnate—He is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty itself.

So maybe we haven't pulled a St. Peter and publicly denied Christ outright to others, yet I would argue that we deny Christ to others whenever we sin and obscure the image of Jesus within ourselves as baptized disciples. Moreover, we deny Christ to others whenever we deny His teachings to others as well as the teachings of His Catholic Church. We deny Christ to others whenever we deny love and mercy to others, the same love and mercy we demand for ourselves—for Jesus is Love and Mercy Incarnate.

We deny Christ to others whenever we deny the sacredness and infinite value of *every* human life from conception until natural death, for ***Christ is Life itself!*** We deny Christ to others whenever we deny the intrinsic and equal dignity of *every human person, especially the marginalized, the weakest and most vulnerable among us, regardless of who they are*: whether they're born or pre-born, black or white, persons with same-sex attraction, the poor, refugees, etc. For Christ solemnly

told us, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

We deny Christ to others every time we deny the dignity of marriage as the permanent and exclusive union of one man and one woman, a definition that Christ Himself gave us as He elevated marriage to a sacrament! We deny Christ to others whenever we deny the truth, goodness, and beauty of human sexuality, which is naturally ordered towards love *and* life, unity *and* procreation, the gift of mutual spousal love *and* the gift of children—for Christ *is* Truth, Goodness, and Beauty itself and our Savior proclaimed, “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”

Brothers and sisters, sadly, these are the denials of Christ in our time. And just as Christ forgave St. Peter, our Lord promises mercy and forgiveness to us if we repent and turn back to Him with a full and open heart. Brothers and sisters, on the cross our Lord Jesus *died for us*—so do we *live for Him*? Make no mistake, our Savior promises us that there *will be* persecution and rejection because of our faith in Him. But He

tells us in today's Gospel, "Fear no one...And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul...*So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" As we leave this church today, may we abandon ourselves to the grace of Christ and courageously stand for Him and the teachings of His Church with love, joy, mercy, and compassion for all.

So as we prepare to worship and encounter our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, which is the greatest visible Gift on earth, may we remember the beautiful words of our Savior: "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."