

“Life” and “Love” are two similar words in our language. The quality of our life is directly related to the amount of love in our relationships. When Jesus is asked which are the greatest commandments, he tells us, love your God and love your neighbor. Our love for God helps us to love others, because God knows our past, present, and future and therefore has the perfect perspective to guide us in all our relationships. Like it says in the 2nd reading, “No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him.” Let's look at two lives discussed in the bible and how each was impacted by early encounters with God.

In our gospel reading, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” This encounter is like when Jesus met the woman at the well and told her about her past husbands and other details about her life. Jesus tells the rich young man, “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” This is his most direct path to heaven, yet, when he does what we all do, and weighs the options his answer is “No.” What happened?

Well, he is a rich young man, most likely an up-and-coming prodigy among the upper class. Perhaps he's gotten comfortable with his life and receiving a certain amount of respect from his peers. He doesn't want to trade his current life for a life as an impoverished follower of this popular rabbi. What we know is, "His face fell, and he went away sad." But, we have to believe this was not the end for him, we know that God does not give up on us so quickly, He follow us our whole lives and gives us many chances to turn to Him. Sometimes through major life decisions like he did with the rich young man, and sometimes through subtle nudges to follow His way.

Our path to heaven often involves forgiveness for past sins and a resurrection to a new self. Think of St Paul when he was still persecuting Christians, he fell to the ground and was blinded as he encountered Christ. He repented and became one of the greatest disciples of all time. All things are possible with God who sees our whole life and knows exactly what we need.

The 2nd young person I want to talk about today is Mary the Mother of Jesus. In Luke's gospel God approaches her through the Angel Gabriel. He says, "Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with you." And how does Mary react? “She was deeply troubled at what was said.” Yet, God sees Mary's whole life and knows she is capable of this calling. Then Mary asks the Angel Gabriel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” This is Mary's wisdom at a young age, the wisdom to question God. And God responds, “The Holy Spirit will come down upon you.” Then Mary says, “May it be done to me according to your word” almost word for word what we hear in today's psalm, “Fill us with your love oh Lord and we will sing for joy.”

And Mary is filled, literally with our savior in her womb. He is born, and her life is filled with the joy of his physical presence though adulthood. What could be more joyful, than the divine presence of God every day of your life? And like all of us, Mary suffered and lived a challenging life as a refugee and a widow, and she witnessed the death of her son, but the

grace of God and her relationship with Jesus supported her through it all. And since her assumption into heaven, she lives on as the Queen of Heaven to intercede for us with her Son. Mary's willingness to open her heart to the will of God, results in a life of supreme joy.

In 2018, I was unemployed for six months and to keep my peace of mind, I learned to bake sourdough bread. You might say I was trying to maintain my role as the breadwinner of the family. Eventually, I got pretty good at it, in my humble opinion, and could consistently bake one or two loaves of delicious golden brown loaves. To challenge myself, I started baking larger and larger batches. At one point I baked 44 loaves the same day! This gave me a problem, I ran out of freezer space to store that much bread. So, I started giving it away. I would hop in the car with a big box of bread and drive around town, giving it out to friends and neighbors. It was God's way of bringing some joy into my life to overcome the stress of unemployment.

Going back to our psalm, "Fill us with your love oh Lord and we will sing for joy," this is like the abundance of sourdough coming out of my oven, God wants to fill us with so much love that we can't keep it for ourselves anymore, we HAVE to give it away.

So how do we build a firm foundation of love? Author, Peter Kreeft answers this question in his reflection on today's readings. "First read the Bible, especially the gospels, and meet Jesus Christ." The book of Hebrews says, "The Word of God is living and active because it always speaks to the human person in every moment." Just pick up the Bible and let it soak in, let the Holy Spirit speak to you through the words you read.

"Second, believe in him, trust in him, love him, accept him, receive him, both in your heart, and then in his sacraments, especially Confession and Communion." When we practice our faith, we become better, just like professional athletes who practice their sport, we get better at opening our hearts and filling them with God's love.

"Third, pray, both privately and publicly, both in your own words and in the words of the mass." St James is a very special place, a place of worship filled with people like you and me, trying to find our way to heaven.

Finally, "Live for him; live his will; live his love; give yourself to others as he gave himself to you." In living for Him, we find the joy that Mary found and avoid the sadness of the rich young man.

As we go back out into our lives this week, and work on adding LOVE to our LIFE through our relationships with God and our neighbor, let's engage like Mary and the rich young man, asking the deeper questions, listening for God's answers, making room in our hearts for his love fill us, and sharing that love with others.