

Believing Our Identity as Beloved

Fr. Patrick Gonyeau

Hello friends, Father Patrick Gonyeau here at Corpus Christi Catholic Church in good old Detroit, Michigan, on the 5th Sunday of Lent, the midst of our Pray More Novenas Lenten Retreat. If you'd like to catch more from me, you can at Free Mustard Seeds, the podcast I run, or Encounter Ministries, www.encountermministries.us It's a dynamic ministry equipping tens of thousands of Catholics to walk in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We are God's Beloved

And it's 5th Sunday in our retreat in Lent, I'd like to focus on the theme of being God's beloved. God's beloved. And in the gospel of John chapter 11, which was used in the mass today, we hear about the raising of Lazarus from the dead and we see the tender mercy of Jesus for His beloved disciples. Let's jump into it, verse three: So the sisters sent word to him – sisters of Lazarus – saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." They don't even say His name. They just – the friendship, the relationship with Lazarus and Jesus is so defined by love that His sisters can just send the message, "The one you love is ill." -That's how He feels about us. You are the one He loves, and I am the one He loves. Now we see His mercy, His kindness, His compassion, for beloved Martha and beloved Mary unfold as well in this difficult situation.

Martha came out to meet him and said, "Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to Her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know He will rise, "in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told Her, these are some of my favorite words in the bible, Jesus told Her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if He dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me, will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. "I have come to believe that you are the messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

In this tragic moment, where Lazarus has died and Martha goes to Jesus, He gives her the most comforting words that, "Your brother is going to rise and I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, they'll never die." And He brings her to a whole another level of faith, what a gift of love that He lets her respond when He says, "Do you believe this?" And what did she feel when she said, "Yes, Lord."

Like, imagine feeling crushed and so down. And then the springing of life back into your heart, "Yes, Lord, I do believe." So He's raising up Martha in her faith before He even raises her brother from the dead. Martha goes and tells Mary secretly, saying, "the teacher's here and He's asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him.

Fast forward: When Mary came to Jesus and saw him, she fell at His feet and said to Him – feel her heartbreak – "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and saw the Jews who had come with her, weeping, He became perturbed and deeply troubled. The scripture scholars will tell us it's like a guttural reaction, almost like a – honestly like a (guttural growl) – like in His spirit, just (guttural growl), like almost a repulsing to what is happening in front of Him. Deeply perturbed, deeply troubled. And Jesus wept. Verse 35: Jesus wept.

And so the Jews said, "See how He loved him." And we see, as Mary's at His feet, weeping, that Jesus is utterly moved for Mary as well. And He begins to weep, and we know the story. "Roll away the stone." I love it when Jesus speaks out over our lives as well, and He loves to speak out over our lives, "Roll away the stone." His disciples don't live trapped by X, Y, or Z. Because who the Son sets free, is free indeed. We keep calling on Him and He keeps rolling away the stone. He raises Lazarus from the dead. The joy. People are glorifying God, as the power of God is manifested in Jesus Christ the Son of God raising the dead, raising His beloved Lazarus.

A Beloved Disciple

This is for you and me. We're beloved. And these words this story's recorded by John who is called the beloved disciple. And when you go to his letters, 1st John and 3rd John particularly, and in 1st John you see it a lot. He's the beloved disciple, right? But he keeps writing calling us the beloved disciple, the people he's writing to and we know that's for us now as well.

Like one example, in 1st John, chapter 4, verse 7: "Beloved, let us love one another because love is of God. Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God." Repeatedly, John calls his audience beloved, beloved. God has John the beloved disciple, saying to all of us, "You're the beloved disciple." If you love Jesus and walk with Him, you are the beloved, the beloved son, the beloved daughter of God. So, I said it in a past video, like, you know, we're chosen and we're cherished. What is it to be a beloved disciple of Jesus. A beloved son, a daughter of God, is to be chosen. Ephesians 1:4 "We were chosen before the foundations of the world, in Christ Jesus." We're chosen and we're cherished. Now this is not just like squishy stuff, it's real. It's the passion of Christ.

As Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, “When you look at the crucifix, you see how much He loved you then. When you look at the Eucharist, you see how much He loves you now.” The passionate love of the Lord for each of us is what makes us beloved, and learning to live in that and receive that and give that, is what makes us the light of the world that Jesus said we are in Matthew 5.

Growing to be Beloved

So how do we grow in being beloved? Well, what comes to me is intimacy. Intimacy in the secret place. Now, Jesus. I mean, where do we get this phrase, “the secret place”. I’d like to there’s references in the Old Testament, but I want to point to Matthew chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus talks about prayer. He says, “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

Now that word there for “inner room”, in the original Greek is “tamieion” and it’s a closet, a secret chamber, or a secret store house, or you could call it a secret place. And when Jesus tells us to pray in secret, “to pray to your Father in secret, and your Father receives in secret, will repay you.” That word in Greek, “the Father who sees in secret”, it’s ‘Blepo’. The Greek for “the Father who sees in secret”. It’s Blepo. And it’s more than just physical sight, it’s perception. The Father, He beholds you. It’s to behold, the Father beholds you in the tamieion, the secret place. It’s the heart. We go heart to heart with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and, you know, with no other purpose than just to be together. Yes, we need intercessory prayer and to petition, but it’s awesome just to spend time with God.

The Lord’s Love

One of my favorite preachers, Father John Riccardo, talks about wasting time with God. Going into the secret place, the “tamieion”, and being heart to heart, and letting God behold us, and simply love us. Here in Detroit, our Archbishop is Allen H. Vigneron, and I had the joy of listening to him talk about prayer before, and really talking about contemplative prayer. And, sometimes in contemplative prayer, we come to just very few words and it’s just “I love you, I love you, I love you.” Just saying that, that’s my favorite prayer. A group of teens on a retreat asked me recently “What’s your favorite prayer?” I said “I love you”. Because the Father loves to say it back and it just melts me, it just continues to melt me.

How the Father loves us, so going heart to heart, face to face, you could say with the Father, just say “Father, I love you. Father, how do you see me?” And letting the Father speak His words of life over you, show you He loves you, and rejoices over you. Zephaniah 3:17 comes to mind: “The Lord your God is in your midst,

the mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will renew you in His love. He will sing joyfully because of you. As one sings at festivals, that the Father sings joyfully because of you.” Remember that our lives were God’s idea. He absolutely loves us. Then in the tamieion, the secret place, coming heart to heart and face to face with Jesus our savior, our Lord, our brother, and just reminding ourselves in that intimate contact, and letting him remind us, “You’re worth my blood. I died for you and I would do it again.”

We can’t get enough of you, Jesus. How passionately can we respond to Him? Think it was St Therese of Lisieux, the little flower who said, “*Only love repays love.*” And He has passionately loved us and going heart to heart, face to face with Him, and letting us remember “You’re worth my blood.” And that’s the beauty of the Eucharist: it’s the remembrance, the living outpouring of His continual, passionate love that says I would rather die than live without you.

Come on, like, let that consume our hearts and our minds to be beloved.

Get busted in Kroger, “Why are you so happy?” “Because someone loved me enough to die for me and they’re still loving me like that, and their name’s Jesus.” Yes, give us that grace Holy Spirit to just glow with joy and passionate love. Being beloved, the bride of Christ, the cherished and chosen children of God that shine that light to the world so brightly, like Jesus said in Matthew 5: “That others may see your good deeds and give thanks to your Heavenly Father.” That we get to be a revelation of the Father because we’re so loved by Him, we wear the love of being a beloved son, a beloved daughter. “What is it about you?” “Oh man, our Heavenly Father keeps smiling on me and I just can’t stop smiling myself.”

The Importance of the Holy Spirit

One more: in the “tamieion”, the secret place, with the Holy Spirit, who loves to live in us. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit just wants to say, like, “Do you know what I am capable of in you? Do you know how much we can do together?” I think the Holy Spirit is excited in me, to just keep manifesting the love of the Father to me. Like Jesus prayed at the last supper, “Father, pray with the love that you loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

The Holy Spirit helps us to experience from the inside out. As Galatians 4:6 says, “Abba, Father,” – sorry, Colossians 4:6 – “Abba, Father.” The inside-out experience of being beloved sons and daughters of the Father. How do you grow in it? You spend time in it. In intimacy, the relationship is continually renewed and man, it’s untouchable, like you can’t get shaken when you’re rooted in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And that’s why we got to keep going back to the secret place, the heart, the “tamieion” for intimate worship and conversation with God so we can keep being affirmed, confirmed, built up into the identity that

Jesus has won for us. Being a beloved son or daughter of God. A beloved disciple of Jesus. A beloved temple of the Holy Spirit.

Numbers 6:24-27

So I want to leave you with one of my favorite passages about being beloved and living in the radiant light and love of God that helps us to know we're beloved, and it's back in Numbers, Chapter 6, verses 24 through 27. It's when God tells Moses to have Aaron give this blessing. He's to declare these words and God will deliver a blessing. And He says: "Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them this is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them, 'The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord let His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord look kindly upon you and give you peace.'" I can't get enough of this and I hope you can't either.

So, "The Lord bless you and keep you." To be blessed by the Lord is to be touched by His love and His care, and the Holy Spirit lives in us. We have 24/7 contact. In Hebrew it's Yadah. In Jeremiah 31:30, I think it's 31:31 when Jeremiah prophesied "the days are coming and are now here". Oh, "the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with my people." It won't be like the old one. In the new covenant "all from least to greatest will know me" and that word is "Yadah". It's an intimate contact with God. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord bless you, keep touching you with His love and His care and awareness of His presence when you're being touched. You have an awareness of the presence of the one touching you. And to be blessed by God is to be touched by His loving care and God lives in us. We have 24-hour contact with God. Even when we sleep, pray for dreams.

"And then the Lord let His face shine upon you and be gracious to you." And I always like to think about holding a baby and if somebody said make your face shine on that baby – we know what we'd do – and that little baby smile back but we smile, the shining faces, the smiling loving, kind face.

And this is the Lord's blessing, His design. He says "Tell Aaron to say this. The Lord bless you and keep you." And that, we didn't touch that, but the Lord's saying, "I got you." It's good to be held by the Lord. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord let His face shine upon you and be gracious to you." Literally, the Father is smiling on you. A shining, smiling face. "There's my son, there's my daughter. I love you, I'm with you."

Anytime we say, "Hello, Father, I love you. What do you think, Father?" Father God doesn't have a voicemail or email just direct connection and immediate access to the shining, smiling face of God over our lives. Even when we're going

through a hard time, the Father wants to pick us up, dust us off, love on us. Even in the line for confession. "Father, I love you. Can you help me with this confession?" "Of course, son, I'll never give up on you, I love you, I brought you to this confession".

And then: "The Lord look kindly – look upon you kindly – and give you peace." We've all had that experience when we were in a difficult situation and somebody else shot us a look, and when we saw that look on their face we knew like everything is okay. Like, "Mom's not mad anymore." Or, that co-worker. It's going to be okay. Their at peace, for now, they shot the look. You know? "The Lord looked kindly upon you and gave you peace." The peace of God that surpasses all understanding is so precious, right? Like, we all go through things, and being God's beloved, we can continue to be aware of the Lord blessing us 24/7, touching our hearts, our minds, our lives, with His presence because He lives in us.

The Lord being gracious to us, always giving us grace. The Lord letting His face shine upon us, the shining, smiling face of God over our lives. And being – giving us – the kindness of the Lord. "The Lord looked upon you kindly and gave you peace." The glance of the Lord that just gives us peace and lets us know everything's okay.

You know, I recommend you take Numbers, Chapter 6, versus 24 through 26 and write them down on a little card. Put that little card in your pocket and just carry it around and try to remember that scripture and pray that scripture, and know that's your reality as God's beloved son, God's beloved daughter. The Father just can't get enough of you. Jesus can't get enough of you. He continues to pour Himself into you through the Eucharist. Same with the Holy Spirit. God infinitely loves us and has this infinite desire for us to live in His presence. That's why we were created and redeemed and brought into friendship with God, to live in God's presence.

Just put on a smile. Walk around with a smile knowing whose you are, who you are, how loved you are. Let others see it. We can tell them why we're joyful, why we're kind, why we have peace, and patience, and goodness, and kindness, and gentleness. All the fruits of the Holy Spirit are amazing bait for Evangelization, sharing the good news. Let somebody else notice that you're walking around in love. And then tell them why you're in love and ask them if they'd like some, because there's always room in the Father's house. Just, "Can I say a prayer for you, in the name of Jesus?"

Brothers and sisters, lets conclude this reflection on being beloved, with a prayer to the Holy Spirit asking him to animate us with God's love like never before.

Closing Prayer

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit, Come Holy Spirit and wash us head to toe. Help us to be flooded and filled with the amazing love of the Father for us, His sons and daughters. Holy Spirit Help us to know the passionate heart of Jesus for each of us and that He truly says "you're worth dying for." Holy Spirit, help us to know the radical power and presence that you have poured into us and continue to be with us, and that we can move in the same power of the 120 who left the upper room at Pentecost. Come Holy Spirit, help us to live as the beloved of God like never before. In Jesus' name. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord bless you, the Lord keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you, be gracious to you. The Lord look kindly upon you, and give you peace. God bless you friends.