

Growing in Grace #5—Loving Ministry

So far, we have talked about the Beginnings of our Life in Christ, we have shared about our Study and Prayer as we began to Grow in Grace. We have seen how the Sacraments help us to become the Christians that we want to be. Each of us has wanted to Grow closer to Jesus, to become more like Him, heading towards becoming the Saints that the Lord wants us to be.

However, when we listen to the words of Jesus, when we look at His life, when we try to understand Him, we discover that our lives are not a reflection of His Life. Our actions and our thoughts are different. When we talk about our jobs, our homes, our money, He talks about Love. Yes, Jesus was trained as a carpenter, like His foster father. But He did not follow that in His Life. Jesus gathered 12 Disciples, attracted large crowds, and spent much time teaching and sharing, He did not have a home, a job, a family like us. Instead, Jesus walked from town to town, from Galilee to Jerusalem, teaching others how to Love. In fact, the more we listen to Him, the more we discover that God is the greatest Lover of all. God created this entire universe out of Love. In this universe, and within the solar system, our earth was supposed to be a place of Love. Jesus showed us His Love and commanded us to follow Him in loving others. Sure, the Jewish people knew that God loves them—but Jesus expands that to cover all people everywhere. He called them, and calls us to love everyone, all colours, all races, all languages. No one is beyond His love, and He calls us today to follow His example. Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, everyone everywhere. Not just our friends, but our enemies too. Love covers a multitude. If we are going to become like Jesus, that is now our challenge. In our world today, that means we need to love Russians and Ukrainians, Chinese and Americans, Arabs and Nigerians. It means we need to love ALL our brothers and sisters in Christ, and even more, we are to love Muslims, and atheists and criminals. If we are to follow Jesus, Love needs to be the action that drives us. And that means it needs to show in our lives. St John writes about Love in his first Epistle better than I ever could:

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God.
Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.
In this the love of God was revealed among us, that God sent His only Son into the world,
so that we might live through Him.
In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the
expiation for our sins.
Beloved, since God loves us so much, we ought also to love one another.
For if we love one another, God abides in us, and God’s love will be perfected in us.”*

I suppose with work and attention, we can change our personal action into Loving Action. But we can’t stop there, Jesus calls us to change the world into the Kingdom of God—and that is going to take action together with others. The word for that is Ministry.

Ministry is taking our love for God into our daily lives and helping others change. Ministry is love in action. It may start with your neighbours; it may continue together with members

of your church when you team up with them to feed the hungry or care for the homeless. Often the hardest people to bring to Christ are members of your own family. You have to love them yet be prepared to help them accept Christ as their Saviour and Lord. It takes a lot of love to do just that. I know that is true in my own life because I keep trying and trying—and I am unhappy with many of my failures. But I don't stop. In every area of your own life, be the shining light of Christ, reaching out, caring for others, loving them no matter how they respond to you.

Jesus told us a parable that illustrates this. In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read these words: *"Then the King will say...: Come you, whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you... For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me... I tell you solemnly in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."*

These are the words of Jesus, telling us what He expects of us. Our Ministry is set before us. It is in our sight, and we can do it. Simple and complete.

Ministry is being the hands and lips and heart of Jesus right where you live and work and play. It is not telling others how they should live—it is living the love of Christ in your life and witnessing to Him. St Francis put it pretty well when he said: *"Share the love of Jesus with others—if necessary, use words."*

St Francis, who lived in the 13th century, is a good example for all of us. He rejected all the money and position that could have been his and set out to live as Jesus had commanded. He shared what he had with all he met; he stood up in marketplaces and churches and told others about the love of God; he walked all over Italy and France being an example of the Love of God. In doing so, he attracted hundreds and then thousands to follow him. He even visited the leader of Islam in the Arab world and told him of the love of Christ for everyone. Instead of rejecting and executing the Christian witness, the Muslim leader commended him, thanked him, and sent him home with rewards, which St Francis immediately gave to others.

Ministry is what we all need to do—every day—to our neighbours, to our fellow workers, to those we meet. How wonderful it would be if every Christian was reaching out to love and care for all those around them. It would change our communities, and if we could reach our politicians, it would begin to change Canada. The rich would be caring for the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, so much that the poor would become rich, the homeless would have a home, and the unemployed would have jobs. The Ministry of Love embraced by Jesus can accomplish all this. The love that we receive from our Lord can change our world as we share that love and care with others. Love can change the world—and we can start it right where we are. It is time to build the Kingdom of God with our love, right here, right now. And so, I pray each day:

"Blessed, Praised and Adored be Jesus Christ on His Throne of Glory in Heaven, In the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar and in the hearts of all His loving people. Amen"