

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 6, 2025

I find myself as time goes on loving the Church more and more. It's not because of all of the beautiful structures, the beautiful churches I've seen, or because of the beautiful music, liturgy, and the tradition of the Church, but for the love of God that inspires all of those, and so much else. And also, just coming to know the people of God, not only in their gratefulness, but in every, in all of the moments of life - their devotion, their faithfulness, their perseverance, also their dreams and struggles and the weaknesses, all that goes together to make a Christian life. I have a priest friend who jokingly says, "I love the faith. It's the faithful I can't stand."

And sometimes people do want to just have that relationship with God with no regard for the Church. There are many who regard the Church with sort of an attitude of tolerance at best. They put up with these other people, but the main thing is just that they have their own relationship with God. There are some who despise the Church, perhaps out of misunderstanding, perhaps out of a sense of self-righteousness. A judgment that everyone else in the Church is somehow off base. Some despise the structures or the hierarchy of the Church and the leaders. Some despise their fellow lay people. They don't like this or that thing about the Church. Sometimes people stand in judgment of the Church or reject Her for the imperfections of Her members.

But we have got to love the Church. We've got to love the Church. Because we cannot despise what Jesus loves so dearly. Jesus has taken the Church to Himself, united the Church to Himself. The Church is His Body; the Church is his Bride. The Church is His Beloved. So, we must love the Church - warts and all. We must love the Church.

I mentioned a couple of Sundays ago when we see Jerusalem mentioned in Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, Jerusalem is a prefigurement of the Church. So, what if we read again today's first reading with that in mind?

“Rejoice with the *Church* and be glad because of her, all you who love her; exalt, exalt, with her, all you who were mourning over her!” What if I regard the Church really as a beloved mother who nourishes us like a mother nourishes her child? Comforts her child. As nurslings, you shall

be carried her arms and fondled in her lap; as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; in the *Church*, you shall find your comfort.”

Do we rejoice in the Church? How do we love the Church? Do we regard the Church truly as our mother? The trouble, I think, with standing judgment of the Church or despising the Church, or just tolerating the church, or we being leery of the Church - I'm not saying we should be uncritical - but if we have this attitude toward the Church, it's very easy then to stay at the margin of the Church. To stay at the edge, kind of looking in and saying “Well, I really don't want to be fully associated with those sinners.” No. Or if I don't want to be associated with those who don't think the same way and so forth and so on. We can easily put ourselves at the edge of the Church instead of making us the heart of the Church. And we want to be in the heart of the Church and to share the mission of the Church.

In the Gospel we hear about these seventy-two whom Jesus sends in ahead of Him to prepare His way to announce His coming. They must have something more than a personal relationship to Jesus to be able to go out and to announce Jesus, and to get people, to help them to prepare their hearts, to receive Him, that they would love them too. They came back rejoicing. They're participating in the mission of Jesus to save the world. If we are not in the heart of the Church, if we find ourselves on the periphery of the margin of the Church, we are not very likely to participate in that mission. Going out and preparing the way for the Lord and preaching the Gospel and making Him known.

We have to love the Church. We have to love the Church and be in the heart of the Church. What is our attitude today toward the Church, to Her structures, Her traditions, Her members, Her leaders? Do we struggle with the temptation to be at the edge or the margin or are we ready to really be in the heart of the Church to recognize that we each have some sort of role in the announcement of the Gospel. Jesus says, “*The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.*” The harvest truly is abundant today - right now in our neighborhood, in our towns, in our county. The harvest is rich, the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.

God give us the grace today to love the Church more and more; loving Christ and His Church, His body, and may we have the grace to recognize that we, like the seventy-two, are sent into the world to bring all people to Christ.