

1 Peter 4:7-10 (NKJV)

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

One of the hats that a priest wears is as a spiritual counselor. Right now I am working with someone who is exploring a vocation as a lay monastic. The questions that they have are insightful and challenging, to say the least.

Right now we are working on their personal Rule of Life within the context and constraints of the monastic Rule of Saint Benedict. We are stuck at a place what Benedict called *Conversatio*. *Conversatio* along with the other attributes of *Stability* and *Obedience* constitute the cornerstone of living a Christian life, either within the walls of a monastery or out in the world.

Where we are stuck is in trying to comprehend, to understand what this term *Conversatio* means. In many ways it corresponds to the word conversion.

So let's talk a bit about conversion this morning.

Today is the Sunday of the Ascension, the Sunday between the departure of our Lord back into Heaven and Pentecost, the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It is a time of anticipation, of waiting of patience.

Jesus has gone back to the Father and He has left us with an example of a life that is totally in sync, in tune with the Father. He has not wavered one iota in his obedience, in the stability of his mission on earth, even when it meant his death, death by crucifixion.

Conversatio is then the conversion of our bodies and souls to be more conformed to His. This term pertains, describes to how we live a life of conversion, that we live a life of conversion.

Let's face it, we are converted by process, a process that can be painfully slow and can be actually painful. What we are talking about is the death of our ego and replacing it with the presence of God. What we are talking about is getting rid of all the "stuff" we drag along with us and letting Jesus carry it for us. What we are talking about is living a life attuned with God in the same way that Jesus was able to and many of the Apostles were able to do after Pentecost.

This calls for us to realize that we are totally dependent on God. This calls for us to die to the world and all that it represents, to turn our backs to the world and journey with God. Benedict was writing to monks but more so to all of us that are called to be Christians.

To quote Benedict from the Prologue to the Rule, *If we wish to reach eternal life, even as we avoid the torments of hell, then – while there is still time, while we are in this body and have time to accomplish all these things by the light of life – we must run and do now what will profit us forever.*

That, my brothers and sisters, is what is meant by conversion or Conversatio, to change, to change radically from being worldly to Holy; to change ourselves from the caterpillar to the butterfly, to experience the metamorphosis into the person that God wants us to be.

Jesus didn't come to live with us just so we could be "good" people. I'm sure there are going to be a lot of "good" people in Hell. Benedict wrote, *Live in fear of judgment day and have a great horror of hell. Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire. Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die.*

We can pretend all we want to but the fact is that Jesus is coming back, that He is coming back to judge us, each and every one of us.

Today, we celebrate the Sunday in Ascensiontide. We come together today to say good bye to the earthly mission of our Lord and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We also come together to remember that Jesus is going to return in the same way that he ascended but with the whole host of Heaven to separate the sheep from the goats, to separate the chaff from the wheat, to separate those who truly followed Him from those who merely gave lip service to his commandments.

We follow our Lord not by observing a fixed set of rule and regulations that are externally imposed upon us but rather by letting the love of God, by letting God endue us with His Grace to live as Jesus lived in total obedience to God's will.

Life is hard. Life without God is impossible.

God gives us this gift of conversion, of Conversatio, so that we can live with Him forever.

Amen.