

We conclude today with our series on giving an effective witness. Last week, I spoke about finding common ground when we speak to others about the gospel. But there is at least one thing that we all share in common as members of the human race, no matter how different our backgrounds and our experience may be. No matter how different we are in every other way, we have all been created with the need to be loved. We were made for love. Whether we are rich or poor, old or young, male or female, gay or straight, Republican or Democrat, it doesn't matter. We need to be loved, we need to feel understood and accepted, flaws and all. We were created with that need.

When that need is unfulfilled, we may feel like the leper in our first reading. Imagine what it must have been like to receive that sentence of exile. You see that scab or pustule or blotch on your skin, and suddenly you are unclean, and must live separate from your family, your friends, your job, your community, probably for the rest of your life. Imagine what it was like having to live without love, without belonging anywhere. Unfortunately, we have brothers and sisters who don't have to imagine.

That is not God's will. It was not who God created us to be, apart from the rest of His people. So when the leper begged Jesus to make him clean again in today's gospel, Jesus' heart was moved with pity. There was a way back for this man, a

way to be restored, and he found it. He found the only way: through the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

That is ultimately the message that we preach when we share our faith. There is a path for everyone, a way to be restored, and that is through the love of Jesus Christ. God loves all of His children, flaws and all. We can give this witness effectively because we have experienced it ourselves. We speak as a Jew to the Jews, we speak as a gentile to the gentiles, and we speak as one in need of love to those who are also in need. We have received the love for which we all crave, from Jesus Christ. Our witness is our sharing that gift with others.

Now, when we give this witness, one might object, “Love, huh? What about all the rules in your Church? It’s fine for you to say, ‘All are loved, all are understood, all are accepted,’ but I don’t feel loved or understood or accepted when I’m told I have to change the way I live, change how I relate to others, change who I love.” We can expect there to be objections, of course. In that moment, it may not be effective to launch into a defense of our faith and the reasons we believe what we believe, though maybe it will be. Maybe they are ready to hear, at that moment, why obeying the commandments and living according to the law of God and His Church do not restrict us, but set us free. Use your best judgment.

Otherwise, what may be needed in that moment is simply an invitation. “Come and see. If you have found love and understanding and acceptance in the world and are at peace, then what can I say? You already have what I’m offering. But if you haven’t, if there is something missing in your life, come and see if you can’t find it in the Catholic Church. Come and see if what you’ve heard about the Church is true. I don’t think it is, and I don’t think you will, either, if you come and see.”

That is the invitation that we make. And when people come and see, our mission is to help them become a disciple of Christ, and continually grow in that discipleship, and that includes all of us. Let us be faithful to that mission. Do our part, and trust that others will do theirs. And trust that God will do His.