

+ Maria

September 16, 2014 – Saints Cornelius and Cyprian

My dear Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel – the Church honors today two third century martyrs, Cornelius who was pope, and Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage in North Africa. Besides their martyrdom, preceded by exile, their importance comes down to us because of the stand that they took regarding those who had abandoned their faith during times of persecution. The question arose within the Church: what should be done about lapsed Catholics, who after the persecutions passed, wanted to return to the Church? Some felt that they should not be reconciled. Some felt that they needed to be re-baptized, and Cornelius and Cyprian maintained that they should be treated with Christ's mercy, undergo a period of penance, and be reunited to the body of Christ. We also live in a time when there are many lapsed Catholics. Some have left the Church for disciplinary or theological reasons, but many because of the religious laziness of our times, or the new heresies of indifference and relativism. What difference does it make? I believe in God, who needs religion? Anyway, all religions are the same. Or, God is loving and forgiving. I have to follow my conscience. We know the arguments.

Saints Cornelius and Cyprian loved the Church; they died for Christ and His Church, the body of Christ. They didn't diminish the seriousness of the problem of lapsed Catholics, or the need for them to do penance, but they treated them with love and mercy, and welcomed those who wish to come home. Baptism cannot be undone. Those who have lapsed are still our brothers and sisters. These saints were martyrs for the body of Christ, that body so beautifully described today in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Christ's body, the Church is one, and each has his or her place in the body. As Carmelites, we have a special place in the body – to be witnesses of total dedication, always striving as our profession formula states, for perfect love for Christ and the Church. As Carmelites we strive daily to make our communities models of Christian living, signs of what can happen when people together dedicate their lives obediently to the Lord. And, as Carmelites, we strive to serve the body of Christ and be zealous ministers of Christ's compassion and love, within your charism, for the aged and infirm. Still, and

above all, we must strive for the greatest gift, as St. Paul commands us, which is charity, the excellent way. You say, "The difference is love." You have a shield that says only, "Compassion." But we are not speaking of human love, but Christ's love, charity, and His compassion. Each of you is to bear in your souls Christ's love, Christ's compassion, and this is what you bring to your ministry, whatever it may be.

For a moment, let us consider today's gospel. I will confess to you that this is one of my favorites. For me, it is a sterling example of the character of Christ at work, and how, if you will, His Sacred Heart, his core, shines forth. For me, this gospel is also a marvelous story that gives insight into the heart of Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa. We are very familiar with the story. Jesus arrives in the city of Nain with his disciples and a large crowd. However, instead of paying attention to his large crowd of followers, the holy heart sees the funeral procession of the only son of a widowed mother also, St. Luke reports, followed by a large crowd. The compassion, the "paying attention" to the needs and sorrows of a person by Jesus, is striking. He moves to act, because he sees the tears and hears the sorrow in the heart of the grieving mother. He comforts her. "Do not weep." Then, Jesus breaks one of the greatest Jewish taboos: he touches the litter of the dead man, thus rendering himself unclean. He steps across a barrier to reach out. The bearers of the litter halt, in shock, no doubt. What did the crowd think? Then, he raises the young man from the dead just by His word of command, and gives him back to His mother. Jesus restores life. He reunites. The physical bonds of death and life cannot stop Jesus. He crosses the barrier between death and life – body and soul. The crowd is awed, and afraid, and declares Jesus to be a prophet.

In this story we can see the heart of Jesus – filled with compassion and empathy, ready to heal and love. We see Jesus reaching out and able to cross any barrier without fear. We see his concern as the Good Shepherd of all, as we prayed in the psalm today, "We are his people: the sheep of his flock." This is a marvelous story which invites our reflection.

But, we can also see here the heart of Mother Angeline: compassion for the poor widow and suffering pain for the pain of the old people. We can see Mother Angeline perceiving a need and crossing any barrier to address that need, even leaving her beloved Little Sisters to be able to practice hospitality for a large population that nobody was serving. We can see here the heart of Mother Angeline who went forward against the odds over and over again, confident that God would help her and her companions who sought to serve both Him and His old people. Mother Angeline created an atmosphere of life, and confidence and a positive atmosphere where people could feel at home, and experience care built upon and centered on Christ, that restored and made peaceful the last days of their lives. Maybe we can read Mother Angeline into this gospel, and marvel at how she conformed her actions to those of Our Lord.

The opening prayer of the Mass today for Saints Cornelius and Cyprian asked that we be strengthened in faith and constancy and spend ourselves without reserve for the unity of the Church. This is a beautiful grace. We will spend ourselves for the unity of the Church by being faithful to our calling as people of prayer, community and service, and by keeping before our eyes Jesus the perfect model, and Mother Angeline the faithful copy.

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