

My dear brothers, the officials in our Lord's time were difficult to please. They said John the Baptist was possessed by a demon because he fasted, but they condemned Jesus because he ate and drank with sinners. Neither of these two figures met their expectations, their standard of what was right. They never allowed themselves to be impressed by the integrity of Jesus and John, their authenticity, their holiness, their complete commitment to God.

We can do the same thing. We impose our views on others and judge or condemn them if they don't conform. This is dangerous because we might be missing something important. We have to learn to let ourselves be bowled over by the truth, by the integrity of a person when we see it, even if the person's customs or looks or behavior isn't to our taste. And in the case of Jesus, it is really more difficult to find fault with him than it is to be won over by him. He did nothing wrong; he practiced what he preached, like forgiving enemies and turning the other cheek; all that he did was motivated by the longing to save people: the healings, the teachings, the searching out the lost sheep, the invitation to follow him to eternal life. Jesus speaks to what is deepest in us. He addresses the part of us that loves life and doesn't want it to end; the part that loves perfect life, life without evil or harm or violence or pain. He says you can have that, and I am winning it for you by my death and resurrection.

Dear brothers, we have to keep that offer, that gift in mind and never forget it because it has to do with our permanent destiny as human beings. What do we really want? What is good? What is true? We need to keep aware of these questions, and that's not so easy in our world. We have so many distractions, many good distractions, so many opportunities of keeping in touch with others through texting and the web, so many opportunities for learning and playing and developing our talents at a place like Priory, so much entertainment surrounding us. The abundance of these activities can distract us from the more important things

deeper in our hearts, and we have to cultivate the habit of carving out some quiet time each day to get in touch with our heart, to remember the one who died for us and rose and dwells with us as a true friend. We have to learn to listen to him, to his words of love, maybe in lectio, maybe just in silence, even if only for a short space of time.

Then there is the special encounter with him at Mass. In particular I would like to invite you to make the Mass a time to tune in to Jesus. In a few moments he will through the priest make present on this altar the sacrifice by which he gave himself to the Father on Calvary. He said that when a successor of the apostles said "This is my body" over bread and "This is the chalice of my blood" over wine he himself would be there, offering himself to the Father just as he did at the Last Supper and at Calvary. He did that because he loves us and wants to be near each one of us in the very moment when he gave his life for us. He wants us to take him into ourselves, and to join in the offering he makes of himself to the Father. All we have to do at Mass, at the high point of the Mass which we call the Eucharistic Prayer, is allow the risen Jesus to take us into his own very gift of himself to the Father. As he does that he makes us holy, makes us like himself, makes us capable of giving ourselves to one another in love, as he commanded us, because that is the one thing which is going to make us happy. That happiness, that maturity, is what he most wants for each of us.

The approach of Christmas is a time to remember that once our Creator came to visit us on this earth out of love. He grew to manhood and showed us what real manhood is by giving himself generously for us. Let's prepare to receive him with grateful hearts. Let us listen to his personal word to us, the word of his love, the word of what he wants to do for us, how he wants to help us. If we attend to him, Scripture says we will be like a well-watered tree that will bear abundant fruit, both for ourselves and for our neighbor. May

the Lord bring that about in each one of us by his most merciful coming.