

Homily
Friday of the 15th Week in Ordinary Time
July 19, 2024

Who can be a minister at a Baptism? This is a question I pose to those parents preparing to Baptize their children. The deacon, priest and bishop are the ordinary ministers of Baptism. But, in extraordinary circumstances, such as imminent danger of death, anyone, even an atheist, can minister a Baptism, as long as their intention is sincere and they use the proper matter and form.

Baptism is necessary for salvation. The CCC states, “The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude.” In that same paragraph, it also states, “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by His sacraments.” God knows what is good for us. It is because He is good that He tells us that Baptism is necessary; yet He is all-merciful. This is how those who are not Baptized can enter into heaven; through Baptism by blood, by desire, by God’s mercy, as for children who die without Baptism.

This is what Jesus meant by, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Yes, we are to sacrifice, to follow God’s directions, His commandments, His laws and statutes. But the sacrifice is not more important than His mercy, our mercy. If you are heading out the door to come to Mass and see a neighbor in need, God understands if you miss Mass to help that neighbor (but try to go to Mass later, if possible). If you are in the middle of praying the Holy Rosary and you get a call that your brother or sister or child or parent needs your help, God, and Mary, will understand if you stop praying to offer assistance.

The greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. God didn’t command us to go to Mass above all things, even though Mass is an important and central part of our faith. Love comes first. Most of the time, we express our love by coming to Mass, to celebrate together, to praise and glorify and honor our Lord and Savior. But above all things and at all times, in mercy, to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

The next time we struggle with what to do when presented with an option, always go towards what most glorifies God; love, loving God and loving our neighbor. Have mercy first, then we can offer our sacrifice.