

St. John tells us in our epistle for today to "not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." And yet too often I think it is surprising, because deep down somewhere we want the world to like us. We care about what the world thinks about us. And so when they say something against us, that makes us ask: "Well, why would they say that? Why would they do that against us? Why does the world hate us so much?" It doesn't even have to be something against ourselves. It could be hearing about something that happens to someone else, some other Christian who is attacked because of their faith. That leads us still to ask: "Why does the world hate us in this way?"

And being caught off guard like this, Christians, being surprised about it, since we want the world to like us, very often leads us to try to do something to fix it. If we just convince the world that we're not so bad, then everything will be better. If we can just convince the world to love us instead, however that may happen, then things will go better for us in the end. But that always involves compromise, Christians. And when we compromise, we turn away from what we are called to be, all in this attempt to get the world to love us instead.

One example of this might be when we backpedal. When we say something, we try to soften it up. Especially on some touchy subject, right? Some political question that's going through the country. And we say something about it. We say what God has to say about it, and people push back against it. They say: "How could you say that?" And then we're tempted to say, "Well, I'm not actually like that. I'm a little bit more moderate than that. See? I'm not all that different from you." We want to soften it, to backpedal, to moderate it a bit to show that we're not so different from the world. All in this attempt to get the world to love us. But why would we do that, Christians? Because the world is not going to love us. Because it hates Christ, and it hates all of those who belong to Christ. So it doesn't matter how moderate you are. It doesn't matter how reasonable you are. It doesn't matter how in between you are. The world will still hate you for being a Christian. And we can make excuse after excuse, but it doesn't matter. The world will not accept us as long as we belong to Christ.

Another example of this might be when we don't speak up whenever it's important to do so. We think that as long as I'm just being quiet, as long as I don't say anything, then the world will leave me alone. Then I don't have to worry about these things. They won't think that I'm some kind of weirdo. I can just go on living my life. All I have to do is not say a word. But why would we do that, Christians? Because sure, they'll think that we think the same way that they do. And sure, silence often implies agreement. But Jesus says in Matthew chapter 10, "Anyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father who is in heaven." This acknowledgment, this confessing Christ means we are called to speak up. It's not enough to confess the truth up in our heads. We also have to speak it with our mouths.

One more example might be when we're tempted to distance ourselves from our fellow Christians, especially a Christian who's gotten into trouble with the world because of something that they've done. Either because the world is angry with them, or maybe they've even been thrown into prison because of the Word of God. Are you willing, Christians, to associate with that person? To say, "I'm on their side"? Or are you tempted to say, "I'm nothing like them. I'm a real Christian, you see. I would never do anything like that"? All in this attempt to get the world to love you. But why would we do this, Christians? The world is still going to hate us, even if we

do that. And what have you done in that case for the sake of your Christian brother who needs you?

So yes, Christians, the world hates us. And it will always hate us because of Jesus. So we should not try to make it love us. It's never going to. We should not even try to make it simply ignore us. Because honestly, Christians, who cares what the world thinks? Why should it matter to us? What should matter is our family, the Church. What should matter to us is our fellow Christians in Christ. Because they are the ones we are called to love. They are the ones we are called to care about. And the only opinion that you should care about is God's opinion, and he calls for us to love one another.

That's why John says in verse 14 of our reading: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death." Our love for one another shows that we are no longer in death. It shows that we are no longer part of the world. We know that we have life in God because of the love which we have for one another. Hating our brother is something that the world does. Hating our brother just so that the world will love us is something that the world does. And that is what it means to abide in death. And that hating doesn't have to be something emotional. It doesn't have to just be an emotion which we feel. It could be as simple as denying them. Think of Peter, for example, when he denied Jesus three times, all so that he could save his own skin. That's not what we are called to do.

We are called, Christians, to love one another, not only in word or talk, not only in just what we say. We are also called to love one another in deed and in truth, to love one another also in what we do. Because love is not just a matter of the tongue. Being a Christian is not just a matter of the tongue. It's not just about saying all the right things. Because then we might say that "I'm a Christian" until it actually costs us something to be one. No, Christian love is like Christ. Christ, who laid down his life for us. Christ, who was not ashamed to associate with us. Willing to pay whatever cost for our sake. We are called to do the same, Christians, to love one another as Jesus first loved us, to lay down our lives for the sake of each other.

And maybe that will mean that people aren't going to like you. Maybe that will mean that you lose something in the process--money, possessions, a job, whatever it maybe. Maybe that will mean that you have to associate with controversial people, the kind of people that the world loves to hate. And maybe that will mean that the world is going to call you all kinds of names. So what? So what if the world doesn't love you? So what if people don't like you? So what if you lose something in the process? So what if they call you names? Who cares what the world thinks? Because what means more to us, Christians: what some strangers that we're never going to meet have to say about us, or what our brothers in Christ need? Because we are called to be willing to do whatever it takes, to do whatever our brothers in Christ need us to do. So forget about the world. It's never going to love you anyway. Let us love each other not only in our words, but also in what we do.

If we want a good example of this, consider Joseph of Arimathea. Because after Jesus died, Joseph went to Pilate to ask him for the body of Jesus. And when he did that, he was risking a great deal. Because Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin, the very same council which had condemned Jesus to death. And going to Pilate meant that he was risking his reputation. It meant

he was risking his position. He was risking his job, his very life to go and to get Jesus' body. He knew how much it might cost him. John tells us that he was afraid and went in secret at first. But he couldn't hide it forever. So when he went to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus, he was willing to do what needed to be done. He was willing to show love to Jesus, even when everyone else had rejected him. He did what was right, showing love not only in his words, but also in what he did for the sake of Jesus.

So Christians, let us be like Joseph, even if it's hard, even if we're intimidated by the world. Let us love one another as Jesus first loved us. Let us care for one another as Jesus first cared for us. He laid down his life for us. Let us also lay down our lives for one another. Don't care about what the world thinks. They're never going to love you anyway. But rather care about your group. Care about your family. Care about your people, the Church. And let the world go its own way. That is what it means for us to love not only in our words, but also in what we do.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you loved us first in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us also to love one another so that we may do what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.