

Piety – NewArk #31

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The title of my talk this evening is PIETY: the total dedication of our lives to Christ.

Piety is living in relationship with Christ; living life in grace, fully and unreservedly. It involves a life of prayer and a desire to bring Christ to others, and others closer to Him. Piety, this close personal relationship with Christ, moves us to try to live the Christian ideal. A TOTAL COMMITMENT TO GOD.

WHOA, NELLY!!! Did I get off at the wrong stop? Let me read that again!

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OK! There they are again! Those 5 words: A total commitment to God! Now let's rethink this! I mean that type of thing is OK for Sr. Deborah Francis or Kevin Coffey, or the lovely Sisters of Sacred Heart who have offered us such a wonderful space. THEY OBVIOUSLY received some kind of "call" to a PIOUS vocation! But we're LAY PEOPLE! We have lives!! We have families, jobs, kids, elderly parents, grandchildren, civic commitments. That doesn't apply to us! Does it?!

OK, all kidding aside, the talks that we have heard today were all about directing our lives to Christ; to finding the *Christian* ideal, which is to live in close relationship with Christ.

Piety: a tough word—open to all kinds of interpretation, but basically, Piety is a close personal relationship with God, through intentional prayer and listening, and living our life outwardly in God's grace.

Piety is faithfulness to God as a fundamental part of our life in grace. It is a covenant relationship—like a marriage—promising mutual faithfulness. We know of God's deep love for us. Will we love God back? Piety requires consent from us to allow God into all aspects of our lives. Are we ready for that? And finally, Piety calls us into a new life in which our relationships with ourselves, with God, and with the world are redefined by our love for God and God's love for us.

Our life in Christ is a covenant of love. God wants to be in relationship with us. Piety is living a life of grace in a conscious, growing, and shared manner. The practice of piety is an intentional process of spending time with God.

Piety, study and action are the three elements necessary to grow spiritually and to reach out to change the world in Christ's name.

I think Piety is such a tough word because many times it is used to connote negative aspects of "being pious". I admit that at times in my life I have been guilty of negatively affecting the definition myself.

1—We all know or have been one of those who practiced outward signs of "religiosity" so that they might be seen by others. I was the one who loved to dress up in vestments and be seen on the altar as either a chalice bearer or choir member. Especially when the bishop was visiting!!

2—We also know those, or have been one, who out does their neighbor in "doing good", so we might "feel safe". One Christmas day Kurt and I sang and read a midnight mass; got up the next morning to serve Christmas dinner to those who were alone at St. Clare's Hospital; came home to open gifts and have dinner with our son; and went back to St. Paul's men's shelter in Paterson to serve Christmas dinner. I often think of the pilot's in World War II, who had the hash marks on the side of their airplanes. Could I be one of them?

3—There are also those persons who follow routines of faith solely out of a sense of duty or fear of punishment. For many years I walked to my family's tune, blank eyes, unhearing ears, because this was doing church.

4—Unfortunately, there are those persons who "wear a mask" of holiness in order to keep God and others away. This is hypocrisy. We may lie to ourselves and others, but we cannot lie to God.

Genuine Piety arises out of a deep love for God and a recognition of God's deep love for us. Our whole lives are oriented toward living for God. The writer of Colossians tells us, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father through him."

If we are to orient our lives toward living for God, we need to find some guidelines. Piety guides our lives in Christ and in guiding it, has some characteristics.

1—Piety is to be practiced by lay persons as well as clergy. Normal life in everyday surroundings can still be a life of piety.

2—The practice of piety is natural. As persons in deep relationship with Christ, we become MORE ourselves, not less. We speak honestly and naturally about how God helps us to become what God intended us to be.

3—The practice of piety helps our relationship with God grow in strength and maturity. Living a life of piety leads us to a fuller expression of ourselves and our faith.

4—The practice of piety promotes joy and peace in our lives. We depend on the "peace of God which surpassed all understanding".

5—The practice of piety is intentional. We are purposeful in our regular interaction with God.

Our deep love for God in Christ directs our daily choices. Our Ideal is to live our lives for God. He

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