

- Saint John's Pulpit (May 9, Sixth Sunday of Easter / Mother's Day)
- "To Every Child of God" 1 John 5:1-6

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. **3** For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, **4** for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. **5** Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? **6** This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

What All Parents Want

Happy Mother's Day! I hope that all mothers in the world can fully enjoy this special day. They deserve it! In my home country, people celebrate Parent's Day on May 8, which means there is no distinction between Mother's Day and Father's Day in Korea. Interestingly, people have one more special day to recognize all children as known as Children's Day on May 5. But, it looks like that every day is Children's Day in the U.S. Anyhow, the month of May is a good time to celebrate all family from parents to children.

Here is a question. With what can people bring joy to their parents? What is the best gift for parents? For this question, 1 John 5:1 might be a good answer.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 1 John 5:1 NRSV

If we love our parents, we also should love their children. Yes, it makes sense. My father used to say this, "J.W., although you are so busy for your ministry, and in taking care of your family, but try to keep in touch with your younger brother." Although I agree with him, it is hard to follow what my father says. What about you? Do you get along well with your brother or sister?

What does it mean to be born again?

To be Christian means to have one more birth after their biological birth. We can call it 'born again' or 'regeneration'. Although we have heard about this concept many times, it is still questionable whether we can understand it clearly. In that sense, the text today helps us understand this heavy concept more clearly.

1 John 5:1-2 present that to be born again obeys God's commandments-one is loving God, and the other is loving people.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 1 John 5:1-2 NRSV

Through being born again, we call God our father which means we become His children. But this is not the end. One more mission is here. It is to love God's all children which means love our neighbors. So, when we love our God and our neighbors, we become Christians confessing Jesus is the Christ.

This is what the Christian faith requires uniquely or strongly comparing with other religions. In the Bible, for all who experienced God's presence or the Good News, they shared what they experienced with others. After experiencing God's presence through a burning bush (Exodus 3), Moses was called to liberate the Israelites by God. For the unnamed Samaritan woman

at the well who met Jesus Christ (John 4), she returned to her village and shared Jesus whom she met with people who had bullied or blamed her. What about Apostle Paul? Through his conversion on the way to Damascus (Acts 9), he gave up all his benefit, professions, and reputation, and lived his life as an evangelist, and died for Christ although he could choose his life as a best-selling book author in the world!

Likewise, all who met God met their neighbors too. All who loved God loved their neighbors too. This is the greatest asset in the Christian faith. Now, we all deeply concern about what is happening in India. The news of uncontrollable mutation of Covid-19 and lots of victims makes us worry about the future of all people in the world. This is disappointing all who have endured this painful pandemic experience with patience and sacrifice.

Moreover, we are sad that their religious rituals could be one of the causes to see this tragedy. Without masks and social distancing, people join their rituals together in packed places. All look very confident that their god will save them. However, it appears that they have no idea how seriously their individual faith might put their neighbors into tragedy. This is not criticizing or blaming their religion. But it is reminding you of how important we love our neighbors through our love for God.

A story of Epidemics in Rome and the role of Christians

Let me tell you about a story of Epidemics in Rome. I hope that this will help you understand our role as Christians, especially in the pandemic now. In 165, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (121-180), a devastating epidemic swept through the Roman Empire. Some medical historians assume that it was smallpox. Through this unknown epidemic lasted fifteen years, from a quarter to a third of the empire's population died from it, including Marcus Aurelius himself, in 180.

After this epidemic, the second one hit the Roman Empire in 251. This time it may have been measles. Under these devastating epidemics, what was the role of Christians? How did they overcome these tragedies and challenges? For this question, Rodney Stark in his masterful book, *The Rise of Christianity* introduces Bishop Dionysius in Alexandria (not in Northern Virginia!)’s Easter letter at the height of the second great epidemic around

260. Dionysius highly praised the heroic nursing efforts of local Christians, many of whom lost their lives while caring for others: (**Quote**)

"Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom." (**Unquote**) Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* p.82

How to Conquer the World

As we can see from above, Christians were not conquered by epidemics, rather conquered these challenges. In addition to this, they helped others conquer the world. If so, don't you think that we also can do this? Still, the world is full of challenges, diseases, viruses, violations, terrors, all threaten to separate us, racisms, and hate crimes... the text today strongly encourages us to proclaim that we can conquer the world!

⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 1 John 5:4 NRSV

For whatever is born of God conquers the world... simply speaking, those who love God and neighbors conquer the world. In that sense, this pandemic would be a good chance to sharpen our faith, our identity as children of God, and our love for God and others. All these are nothing new. All our faith ancestors and predecessors lived their lives by faith, and now we are asked to practice this faith heritage, furthermore, we are responsible for inheriting this for the next generation like these children who played beautiful music here and now. We still have hope in Christ. Let's remember that we are called to love God and share His love with others.