

Dear People Whom God Loves,

Letter to Young Man in Prison

Thank you for writing me. I sometimes don't get to letters as soon as I would like to. I will never be offended by anything that you write. Also, don't tell yourself that you must always think the same way as some church leaders do.

Spirituality is not the same as obeying all the rules that come from the church. We must ask ourselves: Is this loving, compassionate, and thoughtful? Sometimes the rules are pointing to something good. The problem is that we may see it as a duty. This is not the same as doing it out of love for other people or ourselves. I sometimes find that the word "sin" is not helpful. When sin is deeply understood, it is helpful, but often it seems philosophical, metaphysical and not down-to-earth.

Since twenty-two centuries ago, most religions have experienced what is called "The Golden Rule." The Catholic Church has it too. However, we often don't use it. It is expressed in two different ways. The positive version is: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. The negative version is: Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.

The value of the Golden Rule is that it can lead us to treat other people well out of a sense of love, rather than just because of the need to obey a law. Here is why: When we start looking at ourselves, and see that we appreciate people helping us when we are going through hard times, we realize that we are being loved. Then we are able to see that we are human beings who are valuable in ourselves and valuable to God. We start to realize that other people are humans like us and deserve to be treated well. We start to love others and start to treat them well out of a sense of love, and not just because we think that we are supposed to. We do it out of love, not to get a reward or to avoid punishment. In the same way, whenever we are inclined to hurt someone, we ask ourselves how we would feel if that was done to us. We honestly admit that we don't want that, and we start to realize that the other person is human just like us and should

not be hurt by us. We don't hurt them because that would be unloving. Jesus called this process, "Entering the reign of God." I know that I will never come close to entering the reign of God fully. We are all called to be on the journey toward the reign of God. The love that God is will help us on the way.

Both the civil community and the Christian community are both necessary and valuable. They are different but we need them both.

The civil community makes laws to keep the peace and reasonable good order. Civil laws are enforced by punishment when they are disobeyed. This is necessary because some people would pay no attention to them otherwise. Also, some people need to be restrained from hurting and killing people. In addition, the civil community has another task. That is to help rehabilitate people whenever possible.

The Christian community is meant to help people to be willing to allow a relationship with God, who is Love, to help them grow in love. This is primary. God is Love. Hence love is fundamental to Christian living. The Christian community is also a structure that needs some laws so there will not be chaos. We must remember that these laws are meant to help the process of growing in love, they are not an end in themselves, and they are not about rewards and punishment.

God loves every human being on the face of the Earth. We are all God's kids. Please remember that God loves you.

Smile, God Loves You,

Father Clay

P.S., Being homosexual or heterosexual are two different sexual orientations. This doesn't mean one is good and the other is bad. It means two different paths. Both come from God.