

## Dying to Self

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13) Being in the military this verse always had particular significance with me and it was always straightforward. Given the situation, each of us would sacrifice our lives for our buddies and our country. Jesus did it for us and we would do it for others – simple. I had always felt fortunate that I was rarely placed in situations of danger where this might apply. Then Father John Kinney, a chaplain at my base in the United Arab Emirates, proposed another definition of laying down one's life – dying to self.

When one dies to self, he intentionally gives up his previous life based on his own selfish desires and takes up a new vocation dedicated to service of others. Initially, it may seem like dying to self hardly compares to giving up your physical life but consider the commitment here. Instead of reacting to a single event of violence or emergency, the person has to make a concerted decision of his own timing to give up an old life he truly loves, for a new life full of uncertainty and unknowns.

Dying to self is the basis of many of our sacraments. In our Baptism we die with Christ and rise with Him, or in other words we die to our sinful self and rise with the one who removes our sin. In the Eucharist we relive the ultimate example of Christ sacrificing himself for the sake of all. When we accept Jesus into our bodies to be more like Him we are dying to our old self. By receiving the sacrament of Holy Orders the newly ordained priest lays down his old life and becomes completely immersed in his new life with his bride the Church. Similarly, in matrimony two people lay down their individual lives to create a new life together more concerned with the needs of another than with self. Should we consider any of these acts to be any less sacrificial than physically dying for a friend?

If we look beyond the sacraments we find even more examples. There is the teacher who could make more money in another profession but sees the value in nurturing young minds. There is the volunteer fireman who could be spending time with his own family but instead stands watch over our safety while we sleep. Then there are the countless parents and grandparents that dedicate their lives to raising good kids who will in turn contribute to the overall society. In these and numerous other examples, people are laying down a life dedicated to self for friends.

This is what I believe Christ was looking for when he said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.” (John 12:24-25) We certainly have the option of only caring about ourselves and what we want. It's easy to love our lives and come up with many reasons why we can't do anything more. But where would we be if we were all only worried about ourselves?

How grateful we are to those who have laid down their lives in battle. We create monuments and hold ceremonies honoring them and for good reason. While we are taking time to recognize these heroes, try to also recognize all of those around you who have laid down their lives for their friends. You may be surprised to realize you are one of them or perhaps you will be inspired to become one of them and share in this gift of love. For this was the command of Jesus: “love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

After writing this article, I was looking for a good way to sum it up. I happened upon the Prayer of St. Francis. The ending to that prayer seems to fit perfectly.

“For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.”