

Mary tried too hard, but she didn't try hard enough. Let me explain. Mary grew up in a Catholic family that took their faith very seriously. Only sickness kept them from Mass. They even said bedtime prayers together most nights, calling them family night prayers when the kids got older. Mary was quite active in the Youth Group when she was in high school. She joined the campus ministry program in college. But during her sophomore year she found herself too busy to be a regular attendee at Mass. By her senior year, the only time she went to Mass, or prayed at all, was when she was home.

Six months out of college, Mary finally got a job in her field. She always wanted to help others, make a difference in people's life, so she had studied to be a social worker. After a number of unsuccessful interviews, an agency in a big city up north hired her to work the phones and occasionally visit some of the elderly poor confined to apartments in the city. It wasn't exactly what Mary trained for, four days a week she sat in an office calling fifty clients, making sure they had food, heat, took their medicine, arranging transportation to the doctor, etc. One day a week, though, she was able to leave the office and visit the people. With fifty clients, she only could see people once a month, but it was something. It was also a day she enjoyed.

Except when she had to visit Molly McPherson, Molly was not nice. In fact she was downright nasty and sometimes even rude. The first time Mary visited, Molly complained, "They send me a kid with her pretty smile and empty head and think that I should be pleased. And then you say you can't stay too long because you have others to see. Well, don't bother with me. I didn't ask you to come." That was how the relationship started. It got worse. It became an absolute struggle for Mary to knock on Molly's door.

Mary went home for Thanksgiving and was able to get an appointment to speak with her pastor. She told him about her problems with Molly. She went on and on. Finally, she

stopped and waited for his response. “So, Mary, how active are you in the faith when you are not home?” he asked. “Do you pray every day? Do you go to Mass every week?”

“Typical priest,” Mary thought. “He’s missing the whole point why I’m here.” So she answered, “I don’t know what that has to do with this, but I’m still looking for a Church.”

“It has everything to do with this, Mary,” the priest responded, “how do you expect to bring the love of Christ to others if you are not overflowing with it yourself? You see, Mary, you are trying hard, but you are not trying hard enough. In some ways you are doing too much, thinking that you can do it all yourself. You need to be thoroughly united to Christ and then let Him do the work.”

Mary didn’t expect to get that sort of a talking to, but she did take the priest seriously. She started praying every day, and found a parish near her apartment. Actually, it was just down the block, but she never bothered to notice it. She went back to her younger days, and became active there, even lecturing at Sunday Mass.

One day at the end of January the temperature had reached 45 degrees. The annual January thaw. Mary visited Molly and decided to use the warmer weather to try to get off on a pleasant foot. “It sure is nice outside, Molly. Why don’t you take a stroll before winter kicks in again, I’ll walk with you.” That just started Molly up again. “You think that just because you have a coat, scarf and gloves, that everyone can go outside. I haven’t been out since September. And here’s why.” Then Molly took out a coat that was so threadbare it couldn’t even serve much use as a blanket. Molly then hissed, “Why don’t you just go back to your fantasy land. I’ve had enough of you for today.” As I said, Molly was not nice. Mary ran to the Church in tears and asked God to help her not be bitter to the elderly lady.

The next day was Mary’s pay day, a whole \$800. She could barely pay her rent and food out of that. Mary cashed her check and then she had a wonderful thought. She still had a

little graduation money in the bank for emergencies. She could use some of that to get by. Mary thought about Molly. She put \$200 in an envelope, and sent it anonymously to the bitter old lady with a note, “Please buy yourself a winter coat.” A few days later the agency received a letter addressed to young Mary. The letter contained \$50 and read, “I know that you must have sent me the money, because no one else knew about my coat. I’m sorry for being so mean. I was able to find a coat for \$150. Please give the other \$50 to someone else who has needs; “Looking forward to your next visit, Love, Molly.”

Mary thought that Molly could have used that extra \$50 herself. She also thought that Molly could have continued her mean streak, but instead she wanted to be generous to someone. Mary realized that Christ had indeed worked on Molly. Molly had been touched by the love of Christ. Molly now felt the love of Christ in her own life. Now this love was flowing through her and needed to touch someone else. Molly wanted someone else to have that \$50.

We hear the message of the vine and the branches every year at Easter time. It seems so obvious to us that we need to be united to Christ to bring him to others, but then we get so busy in doing things for our family, our spouses, or others, that we forget where the real Power of Love comes from. Like Mary, we try too hard, but we don’t try hard enough. Instead of strengthening our union with Christ and letting Him work through us, we go about a myriad of tasks without spending time on the work that really matters, growing in the love of Christ. We have God’s life, God’s love within us. When we are united to this love, even the mean old Molly’s of the world, or the mean old Molly’s of our families, will come in contact with the Love of Christ. And once the Love of Christ flows into them, it will flow through them to others.

What really matters in our lives? Is it the way others treat us? Often that motivates us to return negative for negative. But what others say and do is really secondary to what really

matters in life. What matters is the Love of Christ that we have been empowered to make real in the world. When that love becomes our focus, then we really don't care about ourselves. We just want others to experience this love.

During Easter time we celebrate the gift of the Lord's life we received at Baptism. We need to be determined to strengthen this life within us. We need to be more faithful, more prayerful. We need to try harder in our prayer life. That is how we are called to bring God's love to others.

He is the Vine, we are the branches.