

Bettie Gilstrap's affinity for Angelo State University began in 1975 when she and her husband, Marcus, moved to San Angelo, Texas. When Marcus later retired from Western Communications, he took on the role of athletics team bus driver, Bettie often tagged along.

"We started going to the football and basketball games," she said. "Marcus started driving for the teams, and that is when I started traveling with the teams everywhere they went."

In the 41 years since, Bettie has rarely missed an ASU athletic event. She has season tickets to all men's and women's sports and has her familiar spot at football, basketball, volleyball and softball games.

"I enjoy the games and getting to know the kids," she said.

Bettie Gilstrap is the embodiment of devotion. She is devoted to an athletic department and the young adults who attend Angelo State. I bring up Bettie this morning in order to ask you: what are you devoted to? Is there anything in your life that you are as devoted to as Bettie Gilstrap is devoted to Angelo State athletics? And if there is, would you be able to explain why?

It's no accident that the word "devotion" has a spiritual feel to it. We get the word from Latin, and it means to declare that something is sacred. Something is holy to you. By your actions, you are making something an ultimate thing. Whatever that "something" is, it gets the priority. In the original sense of the word, God was supposed to be the object of devotion, but you and I both know that human beings can put anything in that God-spot. So again, I ask you, what are you really, truly devoted to? And when I asked that question, did Jesus enter your mind?

Today is Confirmation Sunday. Today we are going to ask four of our own young people a number of questions, but the main question; the question behind the questions is this: Are you going to devote yourself to following Jesus? It's a huge question to ask a fourteen-year-old. It's a huge question to ask a forty-four-year-old. It's a huge question to ask an eighty-four-year-old. Are you devoted to Jesus, and His Father, and the Holy Spirit, and will you show it with your life?

This is what Confirmation is all about. These young people are confirming today that they are holding onto the gifts that God has given them, beginning with baptism, continuing with the Word of God that they have learned in the community of the church, and added to that today is the gift of full participation in the Lord's Supper. And although we only have Confirmation Sunday once a year, the truth is that every morning you wake up is confirmation day, and that goes for all of us—fourteen, forty-four, eighty-four. Every morning, asking myself, am I devoted to following Jesus? Will my actions back up my words? Will I give Jesus the priority today?

Speaking of devotion, today's first reading takes us back to the very first Christian church. It's an amazingly appropriate reading for today because it tells us four things that the first Christians were devoted to, and it's a safe bet that if they were devoted to these things, then we should be devoted to them as well. But that doesn't go far enough. If you look at the full passage, you'll see that as the first Christians devoted themselves to these four things, incredible, astounding changes began to happen. It was true then, and it's true now. So, what are the four things?

Number One: the first Christians were devoted to the Apostles' teaching. This was an investment of time and attention and learning. Sounds like confirmation class to me. But this was not just an academic exercise. This is devotion to the words that actually give life in Jesus' name. The Apostles' Creed is one example of what the substance of the apostles teaching would have been, always focusing on Jesus as the one who lived a perfect life; who sacrificed himself on a cross to pay off the enormous debt of human sin; who rose from the tomb alive, neutralizing the power of death and the devil. To know and believe the apostles' teaching is to have a light in dark places, when all other lights go out. Will you devote yourself to learning and treasuring the teaching of the apostles?

Number Two: the first Christians were devoted to the fellowship. There's a lot I could say here, but what this means is that the first Christians were devoted to each other. Something happens when you gather around the gifts of Jesus with other people. You form a bond with them. This is all by God's design, and we need to be a part of a loving, supportive community, whether we feel like it or not. And because there are human beings involved, you will need to practice forgiveness to make it work, but it is totally worth it, and, after all, the Christian Church is founded on forgiveness. So will you devote yourself to the fellowship of believers?

Number Three: the first Christians devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread. There are good reasons to assume that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper. And it only makes sense that they would be devoted eating and drinking this special meal. In last week's gospel lesson we heard that the Emmaus disciples recognized the risen Jesus when he broke the bread and began to give it to them. The holy Christian church believes that the living Lord Jesus is right here at his table, with the bread and wine, and he is right here to forgive and nurture and feed his people. The real question is, how could you be a believer in Jesus and not want a special experience of his presence, as often as possible? It wasn't an optional activity for the first Christians. They were devoted to it. Will you be?

And Number Four: the first Christians were devoted to prayer. They were committed to speaking to God in words and thoughts. Now it is true that you and I have full access to God in prayer anytime we want to approach him as individuals. But the whole sense of this passage is that these were things they did together. They were devoted to praying together, with each other, for one another, carrying each other's burdens in prayer, celebrating each other's joys in prayer. It is a holy, tremendously special thing to pray for others and be prayed for. Will you devote yourself to prayer?

I want to be as clear as possible. Devotion takes work. It means saying "no" to some things that you might really like to do in order to say "yes" to the ultimate thing. But there is nothing in the world more worthy of your devotion than Jesus; nothing more worthwhile than building your life around Jesus. The first Christians showed us how to do that today. And here's the results:

When you devote yourself to the apostles teaching, you learn you are more flawed

than you ever imagined; yet you are more loved than you ever dared to dream.

When you devote yourself to the fellowship, you find friendship, support, and encouragement in a network of relationships that are built on grace.

When you devote yourself to the breaking of the bread, you plug into a source of forgiveness, love, and compassion that can never run out. It's always pouring into you.

When you devote yourself to prayer, individually and within a group, you become more aware of God's everyday presence with you, and more open to Him.

If you want an unbreakable foundation for life, here it is. It's found in a God who has proven that he is one hundred percent devoted to you.