

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time: Love of God and Neighbor

Deuteronomy 6:2-6; Psalm 18:2-3,3-4,47,51; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 12:28b-34

Dear family and friends of CCST,

We cannot live in this world or eternal life without love. We are all made for love. Without love, life has no meaning, no purpose, no direction. We shall never forget that love is the fundamental reason that God became man. We have the popular Scriptural text from the Gospel of John 3:16, "For God so love the world that he gave his only Begotten Son and that whoever believes in him will have eternal life."

We are hardwired to love, and God invites us to enter the depths of the communion of love that he intends for all of us. Indeed, love is one of the theological virtues, along with faith and hope, and love remains. That is, it's the only virtue that lasts until eternity.

In the Gospel, our Lord Jesus sums up the commandment and calls it the greatest of all commandments, that is, to love the Lord with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as ourselves. This call to love with ALL or with everything in us entirely, completely, the most significant possible amount of quality is a radical invitation to live our life to the fullest, to our human potential. And notice, Jesus is putting together two familiar Old Testament texts. He quotes Deut. 6:5 to make a statement about the love of God, and then cites Lev. 19:18 regarding the love of neighbor. By putting them together as the greatest of the commandment, he gives them equal weight in terms of importance. The love of God and neighbor are so intimately connected, so united, so joined together that they are but two aspects of the one same reality, much like the two sides of the one coin.

Throughout the history of our Catholic tradition, those who love God with everything in them lived to the fullest human potential and were blessed with contentment and joy. We remember St. Damien, St. Marianne. Their labors of love for those who had Hansen's disease elevated them to the glory as sons and daughters of God. St. Theresa's strong desire to love Jesus led her to be an instrument of Jesus' love for all. Since she experienced a love without measure, she imitated this love to others in her little way.

We learned from them that the only way we can love God is to love our neighbor, or, another way of saying, it is only in actually loving our neighbor that we love God. As St. John wrote in his letter, chapter 4:20, he said, "Those who say, 'I love God' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."

To love both God and neighbor is incredibly challenging because it makes much demand on us and to arrive at this love is a lifetime work because it is never easy to empty oneself and give oneself away, which is what sacrificial love requires. But we have to begin somewhere else; we have to find something that we can manage to do and be consistent; we can do it through the little way of St. Therese of the Child Jesus.

There are examples of these little acts of love from several of our parish ministries and volunteers that are consistent and pure and build up the CCST community. One of these is the story behind the renovation of the grotto of our Blessed Virgin Mary. We have four of our parishioners who offered their time, talent, and treasure generously for our community. They normally come right after their regular job. Their wives also come. Every time they come, there's an energy that binds them together. They work together as a team. There's no competition among them, but only the joy of having the opportunity to serve and camaraderie with each other. One of them said, "Father, every time I come, I get energized." He finds himself blessed with energy to work. And he found comfort, joy, peace, and being renewed.

In my humble estimation, the simple reason is the love of God. What we give to God returns to us. It comes back to us in a different and exceedingly beautiful way. Our love of God does not add to who he is, just us, our praises and gifts to him, do not add to his greatness, but it makes us grow who we are and what we are. Remember the dialogue during the preparation of the gifts at Mass. When the priests say, "pray dear brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours..." you respond by saying, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church." The offering or love we give wholeheartedly is for our good and the good of the community.

I can say that genuine sacrificial love is true freedom. It detaches us from possession, that is, from what we can get into what we can lovingly give. "It reconstructs relationships, knows how to welcome and value others. It transforms every effort into a joyful gift and makes us capable of communion."

However, we have to acknowledge that it is first and foremost a gift we received from God who loves us first, who gave his only Son to us, our Lord Jesus Christ. We are loved beyond reason and are fed lavishly by Jesus himself in the Holy Eucharist. Through this gift of our Lord Jesus himself, we grow in love through constant acts of kindness, consistent little acts of love that become generous, tender, and cheerful.

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor