

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time “A Timely Commandment”

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There is nothing more basic about being a disciple of Jesus than: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Indeed, the whole bible can be summarized thus: 1 John 4:16 says, "God is love." Genesis 1:26-27 states that we are made in the image and likeness of God, who is love. St. Paul therefore tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 that without love we are nothing. Jesus teaches us this weekend that love is at the heart of what it means to be human and to be his disciple. And, I don't know about you, but I feel like this is a Gospel reading that comes at a good time. After all, is it just me or does it feel like there is not a lot of love in our world these days? With everything going on, the Gospel we have this weekend is both challenging and timely.

This weekend, Jesus gives us the summary of what it means to be his disciple. We have the Pharisees present trying to entrap Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest"? Why is it a tricky question? Guess how many laws there are in the Torah. Put that number in your head for a moment. What if I told you 613? Anyone get the answer right? Anyone need to go to confession? The Pharisees were looking forward to hearing Jesus' answer and then railroad him by arguing for a different law. They didn't get the chance though because Jesus' answer demonstrated his mastery of the Torah.

Jesus gives us the summary of the Torah, indeed a wonderful summary of the meaning of life when he tells the Pharisees, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is a most challenging commandment for those living in Jesus' times and I dare say our own, and yet it is necessary to remember if we want to be considered a disciple of the Lord.

Let's begin with the first commandment, let us ask ourselves, do we really love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? There is so much competing for our attention in our culture, do we really place God first? Bishop Barron once gave an interesting insight by delving into the Old English for the word worship ("*weorthscipe*"), which originally meant "worthiness, acknowledgement of worth". The point is, we worship that which has the most worth. What has the most worth to you? That is what you are worshiping. There are so many things we try to collect in this life that we think have worth but eventually fail to satisfy. There is a God shaped hole in our hearts that only God can satisfy but we fill it with things that eventually turn to dust. Saint Augustine after years of trying to find happiness in the world, and failing over and over again, finally came to the conclusion that God made us for himself and so our hearts are restless until they rest in him. When our hearts finally rest in God, all the other things we value in our lives find their proper place. When we worship God, we are making a decision to place God first in our lives in such a way that, at the end of our days, our lives should not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Jesus. This is an insight Bishop Barron gave once, and I think it is correct. Our lives should not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Christ. Because we worship Jesus, our lives should reflect that reality in every way, beginning with prayer, attending church, how we spend our time during the week and the relationships we keep.

This is what the Gospel is challenging us to do this weekend and it isn't easy. Which leads us to the second commandment...

Jesus says the second command is like the first: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". It seems easy enough to say, to comprehend and yet frustratingly confounding to put into practice. The reason for this is because we are sinners. It manifests in the poor decisions we make sometimes as individuals to how nations treat other nations. What can help us with this commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves is to begin by reflecting on what our motivations are with loving others. By nature, we humans operate more on a principle of reciprocity, I will love you if you will love me back. If you do not love me, why would I love you? God does not operate that way.

Every human being on the face of the planet, even our enemies, have been made in the image and likeness of God, even if they don't behave that way. God loves each person in this world, and so should we. What this means is, I may not personally like a different political party member, or a particular person who follows a different religion, I may not like someone in my neighborhood or work because of his/her lifestyle, or someone in my life who has hurt me, and I may be completely honest that I don't ever see myself being a close friend with any of them, but I am nevertheless called to love them. Why? Because God created them in his image and likeness, God loves them and so should I. It is that simple and excruciatingly hard at the same time. I need to find a way to love them even if I don't like them. That is what our Gospel is trying to teach us this weekend.

A great example of this is right there for us in our first reading today from Exodus, "Thus says the LORD: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry." The reason why Exodus is addressing these issues is because their community was struggling with them. Every generation struggles with these issues. And so, if you have ever asked yourself the question, why does the Church take a stand in support of immigrants, including undocumented ones, or those who are poor and for those experiencing homelessness in our society, here you go. Even if we find ourselves struggling with these issues, and issues like it, and perhaps differ on solutions, bottom line as Catholics, God loves these people...and so should we.

My friends, we have been given the summary of Christian life this Sunday, haven't we? We shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. As Catholics we are called to put God first in everything because God created us, has given us life and he has loved us first. Our lives must therefore reflect that, and our lives should honestly not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Christ. Secondly, we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. We love others not because we are naturally predisposed to like everyone out there. We are not. And this does not mean we condone sin or sacrifice truth in our relationships because love is also honest, love tells the truth. Nevertheless, even with the most difficult people we find ourselves dealing with each week, as disciples of Jesus we must find a way to love them even if that love is not reciprocated because, bottom line, God loves them and so should we.

I think we can agree that the command to love is a most needed commandment these days, and very challenging. We can reflect on what that means for us concretely from the moment we leave these church doors, to when we pull out of our parking spot, to when we get home with how we treat our family members, to when we go online, or go to work this week, when we sit down with our ballot, the list goes on. What does it really mean to love God and neighbor in the times we live in? Our answers to that question are important. In fact, they may be a guidepost to our salvation.