



Homily – 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)ⁱ

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today is World Mission Sunday, a joyful day to reflect on the fact that we are all called to be missionaries. Not in far off lands, but wherever we are — at home, at work, in all our daily activities. So let's try this week to grow in our love for God and our love for our neighbors. Let's try to do more to share the beautiful riches of our Catholic faith with the people of our time.

to help us to grow in loving God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds; and, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In our Gospel reading for this week's Holy Mass, we again see that the Pharisees are trying to "test" Jesus.

If you remember last Sunday's Gospel, we heard the story about how they tried to trap him with a question about taxes.

In this week's Gospel reading, they are asking Jesus about the Law — the Law that God gave to Moses and that is in the first five books of the Old Testament. The ancient rabbis counted up all the commandments in those books and found that there were 613 separate commandments in the Law of Moses.

So the Pharisees today want Jesus to tell them what he thinks is the most important commandment. It is a big question. And not an easy one.

It is a "test" because the Pharisees are trying to prove that Jesus doesn't really know what he is talking about, that he doesn't really know what the true meaning of God's Law.

But he gives them an amazing and beautiful answer. He sums up the whole Law, and all the teachings of the prophets also, in two commands — we must love God and we must love our neighbor.ⁱⁱ

This is a beautiful summary of the meaning of our Christian lives. To love God and to love others.

Love is not an easy task, as we all know.

Love is difficult because love is not just an idea or a kind of feeling or something emotional.

True love challenges us to change our whole lives. True love takes a hold of our whole being. When you are in love, you love with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind. That's the kind of love that Jesus wants us to have for God.

St. Augustine, when he was commenting on this Gospel passage, said that Jesus wants us to love God so completely that we have nothing left over for ourselves.

He said: "What is left of your heart for loving yourself? What is left of your soul, or your mind? Jesus says he wants 'the whole.' He who made you requires you to give yourself completely."ⁱⁱⁱ

We need to give ourselves completely to God. It is a beautiful love that Jesus calls us to. The total love of God.

But how do we do that? No one can see God. So how do we love him?

We show our love for God by our love for others.

My brothers and sisters, we must remember that the love of God is not real if it is not manifested in the love for others. In today's Gospel Jesus is telling us that we cannot have the one without the other. We cannot love God whom we have not seen if we do not love our brothers and sisters who we have seen.^{iv}

Our love for our neighbors will spring naturally from our genuine love of God. And our love of God will be demonstrated and strengthened by our love for our neighbors.

This is the lesson in the first reading today. God tells the Israelites that they must express their love for him in works of mercy and concrete acts of care for the most vulnerable people in society — the immigrant, the poor, widows and orphans.

Jesus, as we know, said the same thing. He said that the worth of our lives would be judged by the love we show to the least of our brothers and sisters.

And Jesus went further, because he *identified* himself totally with the hungry and thirsty, the immigrant, the naked, the sick, and those in prison.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has written: "In the least of our brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God. ... Love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God. Closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God."^v

So this morning, my brothers and sisters, our readings challenge us to reflect on our love. Our love for God, and our love for our neighbor. Are we giving everything we can to God, or are we holding some things back? Is there more that we can do to open our eyes to our neighbors in need? Do we see our acts of love as a pathway that leads us to God?

We are called to be good examples. That's what St. Paul is talking about in today's second reading.

He is writing to the Thessalonians and he is happy because they listened to his preaching and imitated his example. They have become, he says, "a model for all the believers."

That is what we want to be also. Each of us needs to be a good example of the love of God and the love of neighbor.

So let us ask today in this Holy Mass for the grace to love God and the courage to love our neighbor.

And we need to correspond to his grace and to try to grow in the love of God in our daily life through our practice of love for others.

We can start with those whom God has placed closest to us — people in our family, in our workplaces. To grow in love, we need to pay attention to our relationships — what we say and how we treat others. We can try to grow in our friendliness, in showing respect, in being more understanding of others' failings and weaknesses.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say: "We have been created for greater things — to love and to be loved."^{vi}

And that is the good news in our Gospel today. We are children of God. God's sons and daughters. We are all children of his love. And as God so loved the world that he gave us his only begotten Son, so we love him by giving ourselves to others.^{vii}

This is the way we will find our true happiness. The way of love is the way of joy.

So let us ask Mary, our Blessed Mother and the Mother of Fair Love, to help us to grow in loving God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds; and, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

ⁱ Readings: Exod. 22:20–26; Ps. 18:2–4, 47, 51; 1 Thess. 1:5–10; Matt. 22:33–40.

ⁱⁱ Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Sermon* 34, 4, 7

^{iv} 1 John 4:19–21.

^v *Deus Caritas Est*, 15–16.

^{vi} *Where There Is Love, There Is God* (Doubleday, 2010), 2.

^{vii} 1 John 5:1–3.