

**30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Ex 22:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10; Matthew 22:34-40**

As in the Gospel reading of last Sunday, the Pharisees are confronting Jesus in public where the crowds can see the verbal volleying and the Pharisees can maximize the damage done to Jesus' reputation.

The rabbis of Jerusalem maintained a never ending conversation of the 613 commandments of the law...which of them are the greater commandments and which of them are the less weightier? How could they be applied to everyday situations? With how much latitude ('wiggle room') could they be interpreted? How well one could make his case to support a particular opinion might step one on the ladder of wisdom and public respect. On the other hand, a shortsighted response might cause one to drop a rung or two.

A Pharisee who was particularly gifted in his knowledge of the law was designated as the spokesman of the Pharisees present. And the use of the word -- Teacher -- to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is used with a bit of contempt. The question is not sincere, but a kind of quandary seeking to publicly discredit Jesus.

**Jesus said to him -- You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

What is meant here is that the love of God must be comprised of a total response without distraction or competition.

**The second is like it -- You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depends on these two commandments.**

The answers to the question: How do you love your neighbor? vary according to who is asked. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the lonely, surprising someone who is down in the dumps with flowers, reading a book to a child, pulling over to help a stranded motorist, welcoming new neighbors, visiting someone in a hospital or nursing home, helping someone cope with loss or tragedy. The answers are many and varied. It is not a mind-bending query.

On the other hand, how about the question: How do you love God? The answers may not come to mind as easily. Do you love God by praying? Do you love God by kneeling for a long time? Do you love God by appreciating a sunset? Do you love God by burning incense and chanting psalms? Do you love God by suffering through a homily?

The love of God could be found in every one of these; but it seems like the most immediate way to love God is to love a neighbor - not an obvious connection.

Every neighbor bears the likeness and image of God and possesses the highest dignity by being a special creation of God.

Our mission is the same - to love. This is what Jesus seemed to be saying to the Pharisees. This is also what he has to say to us now: To love God and to love one another as we love ourselves.

How do we express our love to God? Be with God in prayer, in reviewing our relationship with God every day, in just being with God in our thoughts and actions.

This is a great challenge to take because there are many things, persons, events, experiences, and even the circumstances today that tend to take God out of the picture.

### **How do we express our love to our neighbors?**

Jesus said to love one another...**not to love another one**. The first reading also tells us of the ways to express our love to our neighbors. For instance: 'If you take another's cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him before sunset. It is all the covering he has...what else would he sleep in? This calls us to be concerned to other people in the world. And St Paul in our second reading, reminds us to act really in a Christian way...if we claim to be Christians and proud of it, then we should express it our actions, in our examples, not to show off but to show that we are really living the Christian values and attitude.

### **How can we express our love for ourselves?**

It is not a selfish way of loving, yet it is another important element that Jesus really has added on in his two-fold command of love. If our mission is to love, we must have that love for ourselves so that we'll have something to give. We can't give what we don't have. During his busy ministry of preaching, teaching and doing miracles, Jesus made it sure to have a quiet time for himself, going off by himself to pray, to get in touch with God.

John Powell, a Jesuit priest writes that the secret to stay in love is DIALOGUE. So to remain in love is to dialogue with God, with our neighbors, with ourselves even. We have to keep the communication open...always keep in touch with God.

To love God means a dedication of the entire person to God's will, placing God first in the mind and the heart. To love neighbor as ourselves means looking at and treating others with the respect God gave them.

We must always remember that the spirit of the Law demands far more than what is written. Love of God lives every waking moment of the day. Love of neighbor

extends beyond our family and friends to strangers, especially to the poor, the sick, and the sinner. Love of neighbor knows no national borders or class distinctions or barriers of any kind.

There were 613 laws detailed in the Torah. All were seen as the direct revelation from God of what He wanted people to do. The Pharisees were determined that God's will be followed. In Jesus' time, many were mere legalists, concerned with the minimum of what was expected of them. But there were many others who were quite sincere. How can we serve God? Of all the precepts of the Torah, which were the most important? Jesus' answer was from Deuteronomy - "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" and Leviticus - "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

He pointed out the two fundamental precepts from which common sense would dictate what God wants. There was nothing that said, "You should place God before your stuff. That was implied in the first precept of loving God with all our heart soul and might. There was nothing that said you must give a piece of meat to the widow. That was implied in "love your neighbor as yourself."

A fundamental theme that runs throughout the entire Bible is this: "God offers, we respond." God's offer of love for us is a given; God's unconditional love is always offered to us no matter what. The result depends upon our response to God's offer.

Jesus is telling us here that love is something we do. Love is a choice, a decision, a commitment to do things. That is why Jesus is commanding us to love others. It's what we do to others not how we feel toward them that matters.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate realist. He mandates us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are to especially love those who are unlovable, those who live on the margins of our lives.

Jesus says to us, simply love your neighbors. Love them, the good and the bad alike, with the unconditional love with which our God loves them. Love all of your neighbors in what you do to them, in what you do for them, and in how you act toward them. My religion, says Jesus, is a matter of what we do.

**(Fr Charles Irvin)**

Jesus' answer was conservative and orthodox. Lifestyle drew the difference between Jesus and his opponents. The Pharisees discussed love as the key for interpretation. Jesus lived out that love. His concern for the poor, the outcast, and the sinner mirrored God's loving concern for his people.

To love God means a dedication of the entire person to God's will, placing God first in the mind and the heart. To love neighbor as ourselves means looking at and treating others with the respect God gave them.

Loving God and neighbor must be the fundamental precepts of our lives. Jesus says all of scripture flows from these laws. The Bible is the book of God's love for his people. Every action of God, from our creation through our redemption as detailed in the Bible is an expression of the Infinite Love our God has for us. To really be a Godly people, we have to give life to the scripture by allowing the actions of our lives to resonate the voice of God's love.

**(Fr Joe Pelligrino)**

**QAC 'Be the Church' weekend...**I can't think of a better way for a Christian community to do such than to practice what they preach. On this 'Be the Church' weekend, our family pulls together to be Christ for one another...to live out then mandate to love our neighbor regardless of who our neighbor is, and in doing so, loving God and ourselves as God loves us...'to be the holy people God calls us to be.'