

October 25, 2020, 30th Week of Ordinary Time Homily

It is a topic which has thrilled and perplexed us since the beginning of humanity: Love.

Countless films and songs and books have dared to tackle it's meaning. The Bible alone makes over 500 references to love. But too often, our use of love is misapplied:

“I love that outfit”

“I love this song”

“I'd love to go out for lunch”

You see, Love is not a feeling or an instinct. Love is an act, an act of willing the good of another. So when we hear that our God loves all of us freely, because our notion of love may be misapplied, we may fear, overlook, or even deny it.

But it's not just us who feel this way. Great, powerful figures in Scripture have often been afraid to fully embrace God's love. Look at the writers of today's readings: Moses, Paul, and Matthew. All fragile human beings who proved that

despite their human weakness and their sins, by embracing God's call, they could truly be one with Him in love.

In our readings we heard about love, and we began in terms of love and the law. Now when we think of laws and of breaking the laws, certainly we know how hazardous that can be to our relationships, be it to the state or to one another.

In our first reading from Exodus, we are reminded of the loving relationships the Lord wants the Israelites to have with those who are underprivileged. Whether it is the alien, forced to leave their home because of war, plague, or famine, or with those who are widows and the orphans, when we show compassion, love will never die.

In the Second Reading, Paul reminds us of his example that to fully live one's Christian life, it is necessary to "become imitators of God", to live in love, as Christ loved and sacrificed himself for every single one of us.

Be imitators of God. Love like Christ loved. Not as easy as loving grandma's cooking. To love like Christ means to love not just our friends or our families. But everyone. The guy who cuts you off on the highway. Love. People whose flags and banners we may disagree with. Love. The People in our lives who've done us wrong. Paul tells us to be imitators of Christ. And love.

And finally, in today's gospel, Christ himself is put to a test. Remember, for the last few weeks, we have been told about some groups who definitely did not love Jesus and what he had been saying. The chief priests and elders, the Herodians, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

This is the final test from the Pharisees. One of their great Torah experts asks Jesus to state which commandment in the law is the greatest. This could have been a sincere question, as it was one debated by the Rabbis of the time, but the gospel specifically mentions that this particular question was testing Jesus. But Jesus could see through the trap because Jesus could see right through to this man's heart.

Now when we say the law, this is not merely the 10 Commandments we learn in Faith Formation. Remember those laws from the first reading. Well for the Jews there were over 600 more, 613 laws to be exact.

Christ is asked, Which of the 613 laws ranked as the most important? 613 laws, everything from belief in God, to how to treat our brothers and strangers, to what they could or could not eat or wear. This would be like asking all of us here to state definitively the greatest film in history, the greatest song ever recorded, the greatest pastor to ever preach a homily.

But when challenged, Christ, as always, does not disappoint with his answer.

He doesn't go with any of the nearly 400 prohibitions of the law, those laws meant to cripple through guilt.

Instead, Christ combines two Old Testament classics, starting with Deuteronomy's "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Here, Christ places our walking in faith with God first in our lives.

Then Jesus goes to Leviticus as he quickly combines the love of God to the love of neighbor.

For those who lived during Christ's time, notions of love and hate were in great opposition. You loved those in your circle. You hated the outsiders.

But this is the key. The answer to precisely why God took human form. Jesus came to show us that God loves us all as he puts these two laws together and friends, we are reminded that that love is not meant to be held selfishly but to be shared:

with the orphans, the widows, the aliens seeking asylum, and our neighbors, ALL of our neighbors.

We don't need to search far to see Christ's point. That love of God and love of self and neighbor is an act of willing the good of another. It's the sacrifice of our time, talent, and treasure to any in need.

And this love is modeled beautifully in the ultimate act of Christ's sacrifice on the cross so that when we receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, in our fragile state, we know we will never struggle alone because we have been loved since before we were born.

It is not easy to love as God loves. We can't equate the love of the Red Sox to the Love our God has for us.

But to love the Lord, we must be with the Lord and include Him in our community every moment with open minds and open hearts.

It is often a challenge to love when we are disappointed, or angry, or depressed. Not just with God, but with ourselves. We must love ourselves. Even when the Dalai Lama was asked what he thought about "loving your neighbor as yourself." His response was one we may relate to. He replied, simply: "Poor Neighbor."

Jesus gave us the key that unlocks the gates of heaven for us. When we accept His invitation of love we are letting God enter our hearts and souls and clean house.

Then Christ will not only live in us but He will love in us, then we will be able to love God, ourselves, and our neighbor with Christ's Sacred Heart.

Then following the greatest commandments will be as easy as loving grandma's cooking.

God Bless.