

**Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**October 29, 2023**

The central theme of today's readings is the greatest commandment in the Bible, namely, to respond to God's love for us by loving Him, and then to express that love in action by loving Him who is living in our neighbor. I believe love for God is tested and put into practice by the way we love our neighbor.

There is a legend handed down from the early Church about John, the beloved disciple of Jesus and one of the original twelve apostles. He's the only one that didn't die as a martyr but lived to a ripe old age. In his later years, not only his body, but also his eyesight and his mind began to fail him. Eventually, according to the legend, John's mind had deteriorated to the point that he could only speak few words, one sentence, which he would repeat over and over and over again. You can imagine the high regard in which the early Church must have held the last surviving apostle of Jesus.

The legend has it that every Lord's Day, that's every Sunday, John would be carried into the midst of the congregation that had assembled for worship in the Church at Ephesus where John spent the last years of his life. Total silence would fall over the congregation, even though they already knew what John was going to say. Then the old man would speak the words, "My little children, love one another." John would repeat these six worded sentence over and over and over to them until he grew tired from talking, and no one yawned, or looked at his or her watch, or gazed off into space absentmindedly. They listened as John preached his six-word sermon over and over: "My little children, love one another."

**"Teacher, which commandment in the law  
is the greatest?"**

By rabbinical count, 'the Law' consisted of some 613 commandments. The question as to which commandment was the greatest was one

frequently discussed among the rabbis. In today Gospel, Jesus was asked to name one, but responded by naming two. That is because, for him, the second followed directly and necessarily from the first. Love of neighbor arises out of love of God, and both commandments are found in the Old Testament. What is new, my dear friends, is not the fact that Jesus brought these two commandments together, but that he made them of equal importance.

Love the Lord, your God.  
Love your neighbor as yourself.

It sounds so simple. And maybe it is.

It always amazes me that Christians can disagree on so much. And not just in minor ways, or insignificant ways. I'm talking about big disagreements on very important things. And I'm also not talking about doctrinal issues, disagreements surrounding Eucharist or Mary or Grace or Justification or Authority. I'm talking about the actual day-to-day choices we make in our lives, for our families, for our communities, and for our world.

If we are all trying to live lives in imitation of Jesus, if we are all trying to listen to what Jesus said and did and put those things into practice, shouldn't we agree on most things? Shouldn't we look at situations and be on the same page as to what we should do, or how we should do it, or what the ultimate goal is?

How can Christians be diametrically opposed on so many things and on so many issues?

Love the Lord, your God.  
Love your neighbor as yourself.

Just the way I like it. Simple.

But maybe we treat these things as if they are not simple at all. Maybe we've done what society seems to do on a daily basis in many areas of our lives - complicate things when they don't need to be complicated, nor should be complicated. Love and love and love. Anything else is not of God. Anything else is not our calling. Anything else is beneath us, beneath the beautiful people God created us to be, and died for us to be. And if words aren't enough, if what Jesus said in the passage we just heard is not convincing, or if you don't think he really meant what he said, we only need look at the cross. The cross said it all. Even in the face of that great trial, Jesus (our Lord and God) was unwilling to do anything but love.

Is that also the ONLY thing WE are all willing to do? Or do we fill our days with actions that stem from all sorts of different motives? Do we look for ways NOT to love, find excuses and rationalizations for whatever it is that we want to do or not do? In other words, do we figure out the choice we want to make and then try to shoe-horn our image of God into that choice? (Ex: I'm not going to give money to any charities because I can't really be sure they won't just rip me off. Or, I'm not going to forgive my friend because that will just encourage him / her to act badly again. Or, I don't care if some civilians get killed by our bombs, that's not my problem - it's theirs. Or, so what, if I take a few things from work, they don't pay me enough to start with.) It's sad but true that we so often simply do what we want and find a way to be okay with it. But God isn't okay with it. And that should matter.

My dear friends in Christ, when I say following Jesus is "simple" I don't mean "it's easy". It's not. It takes courage and perseverance and compassion and trust and all sorts of other God-given gifts. But it IS simple when it comes to the MOTIVES under which we are called to act.

And it's not plural. It's not "motives". It's one, simple motive - love.

Acting out of any other motive simply means that we've stopped following in Jesus' footsteps, we have stopped following where he leads. And that will just get us lost.

As St. John the Apostle would say, "My little children, love one another."