

OCTOBER 29, 2017

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 EX 22:20-26

RESPONSORIAL PSALM PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.

READING 2 1 THES 1:5C-10

GOSPEL MT 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "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. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

HOMILY

One Sunday morning a mother was getting ready for church when she noticed her son wasn't up yet. She finally went to wake him up. "Come on, get up...you'll miss church!" she said. "No, I don't want to go!" came the reply from her son as he buried his head under the pillow. "Yes, you have to get up for church," the mother coaxed. "No, I am not going to church. And I'll give you two reasons. **Number 1:** Nobody likes me and **Number 2:** I don't like them." The mother put her hands on her hips and replied indignantly, "Well you ARE going to church and I'll give you two reasons why you are going: **Number 1:** You are 51 years old, and **Number 2:** You are the pastor!"

Just why come to church? Jesus gives the reasons in the Gospel. **Number 1:** to love God. **Number 2:** to love your neighbor. We go to Church simply in order to love God and love neighbor . . . but how does this work? Can't we do these things without going to Church? I would suggest that the answer is this: it is easier to love God and love neighbor if we go to Church. In fact, I have discovered that I cannot do either well unless I go to church . . . let me explain! We are indeed here in order to be able to fulfill the two great commands of Jesus: love of God and love of neighbor. But how?

FIRST: love of God. Jesus tells us to love God—but how, and where? Where is God, that we might love him? And how might we love our Father? Just like loving a human person, it is best to be with the person. Jesus is the way to the Father, and Jesus told us that "if we do this in memory of him," he would be here to give himself to us. As ordained by Christ, this worship of God here is the supreme way to give God honor, to praise God, to love God who is truly present. So, we come here above all to worship God, to love God, the first and greatest of the commandments. Sure, maybe we might feel like staying in bed, or doing something else, but if we are to fulfill the greatest commandment of loving God, it seems we need to be where Jesus promised God could be found—in the Eucharistic feast—the Mass.

SECOND, we come here in order to love neighbor. But, wait a minute, many of my neighbors are not here—ought I not be out of Church to love neighbor? I said, we come here, not specifically to love neighbor, but rather “in order to love neighbor.” It is here where we come “to become sanctified,” to become holy, to become Godly, to be filled with God’s love. God is love, and we can love supremely only when God teaches us to love, God changes us to be more loving, God gives himself to us so that we might bear his love to our neighbor. On my own, I’m a rather poor lover—I’m too petty, too impatient, too judgmental, too angry, too self-centered. Here, I turn my gaze from myself and receive the one who is love—and then am prepared to bear true, full love to my neighbor—to be Christ to my neighbor. Here, we are given God’s love to love as God does—sacrificially, fully, faithfully.

Yes, Church is the place we come in order to fulfill the two great commandments of God—love of God and love of neighbor. We come to love God by giving God God’s due—actively singing, speaking, praying to love God by worshipping God. We then receive God who is love, discover the deepest truth of who we are: beloved children of God and then can go forth to fulfill the second great commandment—to love our neighbor with nothing less than the love of God we are given here. Unless we are first loved with the perfect love of God, we will not and cannot love others.

That completely FICTIONAL pastor I told you about at the beginning of this homily said he did not want to go to church because others there didn’t like him and he didn’t like them. In essence, he did not want to fulfill the commandment to love his neighbor. But, whether the pastor or anyone else, when we struggle to love . . . the remedy is not to stay away from God, but rather come to God and be filled with divine love, which always overflows in love for others.

Maybe you’re struggling to love another person—to accept them, to forgive them, to care for them when they do not seem either lovely or loving. We can despair, or we can flee, or we can just stay grumpy or disagreeable, or we can change our mind by coming here, loving God and being loved by God, and then go equipped to do what we cannot do on our own: love with the love of God, which always overflows to love others, even the unlovely. For, if we’re honest, we come here in some ways unlovely and unloving, and yet we are loved unconditionally as God’s beloved. If we intend to live the Christian life, to love God and love neighbor, it must start here, where the love of God is poured out in the Eucharist we’re about to share.

The greatest thing in life is to love and be loved. If we’re struggling to love, this is the place to come to be convinced we are beloved, and with that confidence to be strengthened to love others. To be equipped for this love, staying in bed, or going anywhere else isn’t going to help. Rather, we must come to Love, be loved, and then share this love. In our life’s deepest aspiration: to love and be loved, then, there is no more important place to be than here!