

The Virtue of the Love of Neighbor

*For all the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (Gal. 5:14)
Bear with one another's burdens; and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)*

The Lord says in the Gospel, "Love your enemies," etc. He truly loves his enemy who does not grieve because of the wrong done to himself, but who is afflicted for love of God because of the sin on his (brother's) soul and who shows his love by his works. (Admonitions 9)

Today's world is one of self-centeredness and greed. We anger easily or dismiss those in need. We are afraid to love, in the true sense of the word, and get close to others. That is one reason that the love of neighbor always begins with the love of God! If we love God and know deep in our heart that God loves us, we will not find it difficult to love our neighbor as ourselves and we will be willing and able to bear one another's burdens. We will not be judgmental or quick to anger. Instead, we will be patient and kind in believing the best of others or willing to give someone else a break.

The focus of St. Francis was on the sources of good and evil; on hatred and love. Sergius Wroblewski ofm, in his book *The Real Francis*, makes a powerful observation which, unfortunately, can be seen in our society today, "If men hate one another and fail to love one another, it is because they refuse to believe that God is the source of good, and man, the source of evil. And so, a man envies his neighbor because he denies that God alone is good and that the presence of goodness in another man has God as its own source. We would not imagine ourselves better than others if we remembered that whatever good we do comes from God and that we can credit ourselves only for the evil we do. We would see ourselves as inferior to all others if we acknowledged that there is in us a habitual opposition to good."

Furthermore, he goes on to say, "We hate our neighbor because we fail to understand what evil really is. The only evil in life is sin, not the apparent harm done to us by another. If, therefore, another is guilty (of sin) and we are the victims, we should feel a burning sorrow for him because of what sin has done to God and to his soul. Or again, if another sins we should not get angry; for that would only serve the devil's purpose, who excites the just man to anger against an unjust man and in this way involves both in sin." This is what is known as the principle of the "second victory". The devil achieves the first victory when evil is committed; he achieves the second victory when we become angry and seek our own justice for that evil. More often than not, the justice we seek is never a true and Godly justice but retribution and revenge.

Spend some time meditating on the Virtue of Love of Neighbor. At the end of your time, ask yourself:

- 1) Look up the word "love" in the dictionary. How is love defined?

- 2) Discover what the Bible says about love by looking at the following passages:
1 John 3:16, 2 John 1:6, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.
- 3) Now take a look at the Catechism, CCC 1766
- 4) What kind of love does our secular society value? What kind of love does God value?
- 5) Who is my neighbor? Is my neighbor only those I come in contact with? Do I will the good of my neighbor? Am I lacking in charity or being selfish and self-serving, instead of sharing my faith, love, material goods, and time with others? Am I willing to give and not expect anything in return?
- 6) Find a statement of Jesus or an incident in His life that deals with the Virtue of Love of Neighbor.
- 7) Find a place in your Rule, Constitutions/Statutes which calls for the Virtue of Love of Neighbor.
- 8) On a daily basis, examine the day for the opportunities you had to show Love of Neighbor. How did you do?
- 9) Pray the following prayer, "Lord, I know that I do not always show compassion, kindness, and a willingness to love my neighbor as myself. I know that I am selfish and not always willing to give so that my neighbor need not suffer so much. I ask that you grant me the grace to be able to believe the best about others and excuse them for their faults. By my love of neighbor, may I give you the glory you so deserve. Amen"

*(Adapted from **Franciscan Virtues Through the Year: 52 Steps to Conversion from Saint Francis of Assisi**, written by the members of the Confraternity of Penitents.)*