

## **October 29 XXX Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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 living in our neighbor. Our 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 St John, the beloved disciple of Jesus. Of the twelve original apostles, only John 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 six words, one sentence, which he would repeat over and over. You can imagine the high regard in which the early Church must have held the last surviving apostle of Jesus. The legend says that every Lord's Day, 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." — Over and over, he would repeat them until he grew tired from talking, and no one yawned, or looked at his 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."

The first reading, taken from Exodus explains the second greatest commandment, namely, loving one's neighbors as one loves oneself, especially the underprivileged. The chosen people of Israel should remember that once they were aliens in the land of Egypt. Just as God protected them and treated them kindly, so they are to protect others and treat them with kindness. Thus, they should become a humane society rooted in the basic religious concept of loving God living in their neighbor. In the second reading, St. Paul congratulates the Thessalonians on the positive effects of their example of loving one another as Jesus had commanded them to do. Their mutual love and their loving reception of Paul and response to his preaching, he tells them, has bolstered the Faith of Christians elsewhere who have heard about them.

In the Gospel today, Jesus combines the commandment to love God with the commandment to love one's neighbor and gives the result as the one

Commandment of supreme importance in Christian life. Jesus underlines the principle that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves because, as God's children, both of us bear God's image, and to honor God's image is to honor Him. Love for our neighbor should not be a matter of feelings, but of deeds by which we share with others the unmerited love that God lavishes on us.

1) We need to love God: Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, in response to His total love for us, means that we should place God's will ahead of ours, seek the Lord's will in all things, and make it paramount in our lives. There are several means by which we can express our love for God and our gratitude to Him for His blessings, acknowledging our total dependence on Him. We need to keep God's Commandments, and offer daily prayers of thanksgiving, praise and petition. We also need to read and meditate on His word in the Bible and accept His invitation to join Him in the Mass and other liturgical celebrations.

2) We need to love our neighbor: 'God's will' is that we should love everyone, seeing Him in our neighbor. Since every human being is the child of God and the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, we are actually giving expression to our love of God by loving our neighbor as Jesus loves him or her. This means we need to help, support, encourage, forgive, and pray for everyone without any discrimination based on color, race, gender, age, wealth, personal attractiveness, or social status. Forgiveness, too, is vital. We love others by refusing to hold a grudge for a wrong done to us. Even a rebuke can be an act of love, if it is done with the right heart. We also express love through encouragement and by helping each other to grow. We express agape love, seeking the true good of another, by meeting a need that God has given us the power to meet, by comforting each other, by teaching each other, and by sharing the Gospel in deeds and in words. We express our love for our neighbor by waiting upon the aged, nursing the sick, patching up quarrels, and listening to the broken-hearted. In short, loving our neighbor is feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, meeting the basic needs of the poor, helping the unemployed, educating the young, and taking care of the old and sick.