

HOMILY

The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 26, 2008 – Year A

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In Calcutta, India, there is a children's home named Shishu Bhavan (literally, Child's Home) founded by Mother Teresa. The home continues to be operated by the Missionaries of Charity. On the wall of the home there hangs a sign which reads:

“People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered.

LOVE THEM ANYWAY!

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

DO GOOD ANYWAY!

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.

SUCCEED ANYWAY!

The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow.

DO GOOD ANYWAY!

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY!

What you spent years building may be destroyed overnight.

BUILD ANYWAY!

People really need help but may attack you if you help them.

HELP PEOPLE ANYWAY!

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU'VE GOT ANYWAY!”

Mother Teresa counsels her young charges that the challenges offered by this sign can be met only if human beings are motivated by *a love and a respect for one another which looks beyond faults, differences, ulterior motives, success and failure.*

Mother Teresa put it this way about herself:

“By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the heart of Jesus.”

(A Simple Path, Ballantine Books, New York: 1995.)

Belonging to God and to the world in loving service to one another is what Jesus meant when he condensed the 613 Jewish precepts of the Law into:

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The Pharisee who questioned Jesus about the greatest commandment surely knew the answer. He expected Jesus to quote the famous passage from Deuteronomy 6:5, which every Jew had to memorize and surely know by heart verbatim. The Schema Israel:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”

(Prayer of the Church: Night Prayer: Sundays and Solemnities: I)

Every Jew was supposed to recite these lines thrice a day. So the scholar who asked the question of Jesus undoubtedly expected Jesus to quote from Deuteronomy 6:5. Probably he did not expect Jesus to link Leviticus 19:18 which says: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* He should have expected this from Jesus because he was familiar, as a scholar, with the passage from Exodus 22:20-26 that we listened to as our first reading of today.

By linking the two passages, Jesus tells the Pharisee that *“Love of God and Love of Neighbor”* are two sides of the same coin—the coin of LOVE. In doing so, Jesus is bringing together three important aspects of three dimensions of love:

Love of God

Love of others

Love of oneself

When someone adds something to an already known and expected answer, the addition takes importance over the known. The emphasis, therefore, is not on the first, on the obvious and the expected—*Love of God*—but on the second, that is, *Love of Neighbor*! Put together, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 indicate love in action. Loving our neighbor as ourselves means looking at and treating others with the same respect God gave them. Love of one's neighbor means respect for others—their life, their relationships, their reputations, their property, their belongings, and their honor, etc.

This love begins at home with one's parents. It begins with every new life that God send into a family. It starts as love for the unborn and grows into the love a child shows its parents and siblings. It then extends to others around this circle. Love of neighbor extends beyond our family and friends to strangers, especially to the poor, the sick, and the sinner. Love of neighbor knows no national borders or class distinctions or barriers of any kind, because God knows no such impediments. That is what Mother Teresa meant when she said, "I belong to the whole world."

The famous Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky, wrote a story about a woman who was anxious about the existence of God and life after death—an anxiety or a trace of doubt I think most of us harbor at some time or other in our minds. The novelist says that she approached a priest with her anxieties. The priest explained to her the impossibility of proving, or disproving, that God exists and that our souls are immortal. Nobody can convincingly do this, he said. Then he added, "Strive to love your neighbor actively and indefatigably. Insofar as you advance in love, you will grow surer of the reality of God and of the immortality of your soul." That is the link between Love of Neighbor and Love of God. Love of God cannot be possessed all by itself without love of neighbor. St. John in his letters emphasizes this aspect of love.

The fact that all of us love ourselves is recognized when Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 and says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" *Jesus is affirming that self-love is important.* The love that we have for ourselves is the basis for our love of others. Father John Powel, in one of his books, tells us about the importance and

efficacy of love of oneself. If you think that you are worthless, or you are garbage, you will not feel like giving yourself to others. Nobody likes to give out garbage to others. Only one who has self-respect and self-esteem and love for oneself can love others, because love is an act of self-giving.

Genuine self-love is transformative. A story is told of a seven-year-old boy who went to live with his grandfather. He was very wealthy and many people worked under him. But the old man was basically selfish and mean. However, the little boy idolized him so much that he couldn't see any of his bad qualities. He thought his grandfather was most generous and the kindest person in the world. Over and over he would say to his grandfather, "Grandpa! How people must love you! I'll bet they love you almost as much as I do." To make a long story short, the little boy's love gradually softened this old man's heart. He became the kind of person his grandson thought him to be.

When we give ourselves in love to others, they recognize their worth. They begin to understand that they are loveable. They also recognize the worth of the ones who love them. Both move on to understand what it means to love God. Together they begin to love God *with all their hearts, all their souls and all their minds!*

Let us pray today to put into action our love for God in our love for others. *Let us love them as we love ourselves!*

Reading I: Exodus 22:20-26 Compassion for the neighbor and orphans.

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10 Paul praises the Thessalonians for being imitators of himself and the Lord Jesus.

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40 Love your neighbor as yourself.