

## HOMILY

### The Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

October 25-26, 2008

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Davison, Michigan

A scholar of the law put the big question to Jesus: Which commandment of the law is the greatest? Keep in mind that in the Jewish way of life, there are 613 laws to obey God. From all those 613 laws, Jesus summed it up: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.* And a close second: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

The word today is **Love**. The word is...love. You know it. I know it. We truly can't follow Jesus unless we learn to love.

The other day I spotted a church sign:

WHEN GOD MEASURES A PERSON,  
HE PUTS A TAPE MEASURE AROUND THE HEART

And it's true.

A psychologist in Atlanta says he meets two kinds of people—the unhealthy ones who go through life, “Please love me. Please love me.” And the other group which consists of people healthy enough to give love, not just receive it. He says the best cure for those who cry “Please love me. Please love me.” is to help them attain a place of wholeness where they can give help and love to others. In giving to others, they will automatically fill their own deep needs for attention and love. No person can be said to be a whole person who is not able to love as well as be loved. Love is our primary calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Now, who are we to love? We begin with those closest to us. Those for whom we are responsible. I remember officiating at a wedding where the mother of the bride had an advanced case of Alzheimer's. She was not conscious of what was going on around her. She never responded with words; all that she did was groan, which she did most of the time. As the wedding began, the father carried in his frail, little wife. As they sat down in the front row, he held her in his arms like a child. When the time came for the bride and grooms to repeat their vows, I couldn't but help to

think that fifty years earlier the father of the bride and his wife now cradled in his arms had spoken those same vows:

I take you as my spouse to have and to hold, for better, for worse,  
for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, all the days of our lives.

That husband, cradling his wife of fifty years, earned a Ph.D. in loving. He finished the race and kept his vows. He cared for his wife until the end.

The word is love. Can you love like that husband loved? Can I? God does, but can we? We must begin with those closest to us.

It's somewhat easy to love the people at home. But how about the server in a restaurant? How about the clerk in a convenience store, especially the one who can barely speak English? How about the person talking on his or her cell phone who cuts you off on the expressway? How about the homeless man who approaches you for a handout? The test of Christ-like love is not how you treat the folks at home, although some of us can certainly improve in that area. The test of Christ-like love is how you treat those who seem undeserving of your love.

If one is walking along the road with an enemy on his right hand and a sinner on his left, and if he can walk with them without accusing them, or if he can halt his progress to help them, then he has risen to the plane of conscientious love. Such was the love which Jesus manifested and to which he summons his followers, bidding us to do good even to those who hate us.

There is a line from the musical *Les Miserables* that goes like this: "To love another person is to see the face of God."

The word for today is love. Christ-like love. Love like the love that sent Jesus to die on the cross for unworthy folks like you and me. Love like the husband holding his wife with Alzheimer's at their daughter's wedding. Do you have it? There's only one place I know where it can be found. It is by opening our hearts to the God whose name and whose nature is love. What are the two great commandments?

***Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.***

Do these two things and you will not be far from the Kingdom of God.

