

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

During her visit to England, Mother Teresa visited an old man. No one ever came to visit this man. His room was in a terrible mess. Mother Teresa cleaned up everything and, while doing that, she found a beautiful lamp. She cleared the dust that was on it, and it looked gorgeous. Mother Teresa asked him, “Why do you not light the lamp?” He said, “For whom? No one comes here.” Then Mother Teresa asked, “If I send a Sister will you light the lamp?” He said “Yes.” A Sister then began to visit him, and he always had the lamp lit. One day he gave a note to the Sister. It read, “Tell my friend that the light she has lighted in my life is still burning.” The great works that Mother Teresa and her Sisters are doing are done with the conviction that what they do for the poor and those suffering are being done for Jesus himself. Mother Teresa told her Sisters, “Our vocation is to belong to Jesus—not to work for the poor. The work for the poor is our love for God in action.”

Love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. To love God without loving the neighbor is hypocrisy. To love God without loving our neighbor is hypocrisy. St. John in his first letter (4:20) says, “Those who say I love God and hate their brothers and sisters are liars.” There are also others who love and help but do not want anything to do with God. What they are doing here is making Man absolute. They make Man the measure of all things. So what they do is for their own gratification and glorification.

In the first reading of today, we hear the first commandment stated in no uncertain terms. “Hear, O Israel. The Lord, our God, is the one Lord. You shall love the lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.” This passage was well known to the Jews. It formed the essential part of Shema, which they recited twice a day. In the gospel of today, we find Jesus repeating the very same thing when a scribe asked him which was the first of all the commandments. This reminds us that there is only one God. He is the creator and father of us all. Jesus emphasized that God should be loved unconditionally and absolutely with all our mind, heart and soul. He should be the measure of all things.

The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. This law is not anything new. It is taken from Leviticus. But a neighbor for a Jew was a fellow Jew—not anyone else. But Jesus redefined the meaning of “neighbor.” For him, a neighbor is anyone who is in need, as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Love of neighbor is not an option but an obligation. We can show our love for God by our love for our neighbor and by the way we carry out our duties in this world. When we love God, we have to be faithful to His commandments. Let all our actions flow from our love for God.