

Homily of 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (11-4-18)

In the first reading, Moses enjoined the people to love God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their strength. The High Priest, Jesus, in the Gospel repeated Moses' words, and added, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The scribe acknowledged that to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself are "worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." At that time, the people had thought that the more burnt offerings and sacrifices they offered, and the more tithes they paid, the closer they were to God. Love of neighbor was not emphasized. Jesus, in Luke 11:12, condemned the Pharisees, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and love of God."

Love of God and love of neighbor are like two hinges of a door. One of the hinges is love of God, and the other hinge is love of neighbor. If any of the hinges is absent, the door ceases to function. 1 John 4:19-21 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

At creation, God said, "Let us create man in our image, in the likeness of ourselves..." (Genesis 1:26). We share in God's divine nature. Therefore, we have done to God what we have done to others because each of us is God's image. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus teaches, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." In Acts 9:4-5, Jesus asked Saul, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul asked Jesus, "Who are you Lord?" Jesus replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus did not ask Saul why he was persecuting the Christians, but "Why are you persecuting me?"

Love of neighbor is so important in our relationship with God that St. Peter writes, "Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). In the same understanding 1 John 3:14 says, "We are aware that we have passed over from death to life because we love our brother."

Jesus in Luke 10:29-37 gave the parable of the Good Samaritan to the scholar of Law who wanted to know who was his neighbor:

"A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim? He answered, 'The one who treated him with mercy.' Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise."

This parable can help us understand who our neighbor is. Love of neighbor goes with compassion, selflessness and sacrifice. We see these virtues in Jesus and in the Good Samaritan. There are 'victim-neighbors' in our family circles, neighborhoods, communities and around us. If we do not see them, it means that we are passing by on the opposite side like the priest and the Levite.

Here in St. Francis of Assisi Parish, our neighbors are the homebound, the elderly, the lonely and parishioners with other kinds of special needs. Also, the students of St. Francis of Assisi School and their parents are our neighbors. About 90% of the students are not Catholic. Almost all the students' parents are low income earners. No child in the school belongs to any family in the parish. Yet, we contribute as much as we can to keep the school running. The school is totally a service to humanity. This is a perfect example of love which comes from compassion, selflessness and sacrifice.

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