

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A
THE GREATEST IS LOVE ANYWAY

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... you must love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt. 22: 37, 39)

Considering the central theme of today’s celebration – the love of God and neighbour – I love to share the golden words of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta that aptly challenge us on how to respond to the demands of love neighbour:

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred.

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.

In these words of this legendary icon of service to the humanity’s “poorest of the poor”, we can find the practical ways to live out the demand of loving God through the love of neighbour, or loving God in our neighbour as Jesus requires of us in the Gospel (Matt. 22: 34-40). One does not have to be perfect to be loved; one does not have to deserve to be loved; we love because they are human beings in need of love.

Love can be challenging in very many situations; not only could it be deceptive, as when it is shrouded in flatteries and pretence, like when the Pharisees coated their hatred in flowery words to trap Jesus (Mk. 12: 13-14; Lk. 20: 20-22). It could be unrewarding, as when those you love turnaround to hate you; it could be very demanding, as they expect you to sacrifice many things, and give you nothing in return. Whatever the case may be, we are to love: “Love anyway” St. Teresa exhorted.

In the Gospel Jesus while responding to the question of the Pharisees: “Which is the greatest commandment of the Law?”, said: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This response, drawn from the Shema recorded in Deuteronomy 6: 5. This verse was a fundamental liturgical text in Judaism that expressed their faith and love of God. The people recited it every morning and evening. They repeated at the beginning of religious gatherings. Every Jewish child memorised it. The *Shema* was written in a scroll and attached to the front door, and every Jew would touch it as they enter their homes. It was the principle that guided their lives. By repeating the *Shema* on this occasion, Jesus took His listeners back to a fundamental demand of their religious and social lives.

The love of God is the greatest and the first commandment. As it was for the Jews, the love of God is what is expected of us first and foremost. The love of God is paramount because God is our Creator and Father. Out of love, He created us in His image and likeness with freedom and intellect. By doing this, He was thus placing us highest on the scale of creation. The Psalmist gives praise to God in these words: “You have made him (man) little less than a god; with glory and honour you crown him. Gave him power over the works of Your hands; put all things under his feet” (Ps. 8: 4 – 8). Does such a caring God not deserve to be loved by His intelligent creatures? The capacity to love is God’s gift to us; love is a reflection of the divine nature with which God created us.

To love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind means that God should be uppermost in all considerations; and doing His will should come before ours. It means we should seek to please Him in all things. It means we must give God our unconditional love; a love that dominates all our emotions, thoughts and feelings; a love that motivates all our actions, and to which all our efforts lead. In the language of the Second Vatican Council, the love of God should be the “fount and summit” of all our actions. Clement of Alexandria wrote: “In deed because we were loved beforehand by Him and obtained our existence from Him, it is impious to hold something else as more honoured and respected.” Is God the most honoured, the most respected, the most loved in our lives? Does the love of God motivate all our actions?

“You must love your neighbour as yourself”: Here, the question of the lawyer to Jesus in Luke 10: 29 readily comes to mind: “Who is my neighbour?” In answer to this, Jesus responded with one of the most famous parables in the Gospels – The Parable of the Good Samaritan, which rightly makes it clear that our neighbour is every other human being, irrespective of nationality, race, language or nation. She

does not have to be live close to us neither does she have to be someone we have met before. This action stems from the universality of humanity and our common fatherhood in God. Christ demonstrated this when He came in the form of man and died for the salvation all, "Jews and Gentiles alike." The love of one's neighbour roots from our love of God: it is because we love God that the love of man becomes reasonable. And the love of man is the love of God made visible. St. John puts it this way: "If anyone says, 'I love God' while he hates his brother, he is a liar. How can he love God, whom he does not see if he does not love his brother, whom he can see? ... whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn. 4: 20-21).

My dear friends, the love of God has to be paramount because God loved us first; we should demonstrate this love through obedience, for we cannot say we love God if we do not keep His commandments (1 Jn. 5: 3). This obedience demands that we love one another. We should model our love for each other after the love Christ, Who loves us unconditionally, selflessly and sacrificially. This means, loving others for no reason, except that they too are sons and daughters of Abraham; seeking the good of the beloved before personal gains; and loving without expecting and reward in return. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says: "Love anyway!"