

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
10/25/2020

## THE FOUNDATION

Once again we see Jesus being tested again and once again someone calls him, teacher, which in St. Matthew's gospel means that person *doesn't* consider him a true teacher.

*Which commandment is the greatest?* Jesus quotes part of probably the most popular of Jewish prayers, one that a devout Jew would pray daily, the *Shema Yisrael*—Hear O Israel, that calls one to love God with all one's being. Jesus adds a second, also from the Old Testament about loving one's neighbor as oneself.

We are in Chapter 22 of Matthew's Gospel and there's only 28 chapters in total. But let's jump back to Chapter 7 where during the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, *Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.* Solid rock is a good foundation and what Jesus gives us today is the solid foundation on which we're to build our lives: Love of God and love of neighbor.

Love of God and love of neighbor aren't opposed to one another but complement each other. We don't simply love our neighbor, we don't simply love our neighbor as ourselves, but we love our neighbor in God. We strive to love our neighbor as God loves our neighbor. In other words, we love our neighbors for whom they are and not for what they do or what they can do for us. St. John says, If you don't love your brother that you see, you can't love the God you can't see. We love God in our neighbor, think of *I was hungry and you gave me to eat* and we love our neighbor in God, seeing someone made in the image and likeness of God and someone who God loves.

Love of neighbor reminds us that love is to be enfleshed just as God's love was enfleshed in the person of Jesus. Love of God keeps us from falling into idolatry, even the idolatry of another person. Love of neighbor keeps our love of God from becoming self-centered and hard of heart. We show love of God by loving our neighbor and love of God allows us to love our neighbor properly.

*And who is my neighbor?* We know that answer from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Everyone is our neighbor. Pope Francis had noted that for that Samaritan, mercy was more powerful than prejudice. You could call that the circle of care. How big is your circle of care and who is in it? Just as importantly, who is not in it? We seem to live in an age when circles of care are growing smaller and people care only about those in their own circle, their own tribe and not only that, they can ignore,

dislike, deride or even hate those outside their circle. That isn't the Christian vision for a circle of care and it's not a Catholic vision either.

Love of God and neighbor calls us to an immense large circle of care. Does your circle of care include people of other ethnic groups and races, people who are different from you in terms of language, culture, age and appearance? What about people who irritate you or even your enemies? And what about people who hold political views that are different from your own?

Sin has been described as being turned in on ourselves. Love calls us out of ourselves. Strip away all the sentimentality and to say *I love you* is to say, I am willing to suffer for you. And exhibit A is Jesus on the Cross. The day I was ordained a priest the Bishop told us, *You can't love without suffering*. Face it. Love whether of God or of neighbor, makes demands of us. Loving our neighbor can be work, hard work and sometimes we can feel an aversion to it. St. Francis de Sales noted that among God's precepts nothing can be emphasized more than love of neighbor, not because it takes precedence over the love of God but because our nature finds it difficult and we have to work at it.

Love calls us to make a gift of ourselves in concrete ways. It calls us to get up out of bed and go to church. It calls us to pray when we may not feel like it. It calls us to be patient when we're about to lose our temper, to hold our tongue when we want to gossip. Love makes people stay up at night walking a colicky baby, caring for sick spouse, being kind to a crabby person, and showing kindness to a stranger. Wearing a mask around others in time of a pandemic shouldn't be a political statement in any direction but a concrete sign of how we love our neighbor and of how we love our neighbor in God.

Love means embracing and being embraced by joy but it also means being inconvenienced and interrupted. Our own St. Therese talked about that. She was writing about charity and one of the sisters would interrupt her and she had to work to put into practice what she was writing out.

Late Friday night I was tired and working on this homily at home when I got a call from our answering service about someone near death in the hospital and so love called me to be inconvenienced and to serve Christ in the sick. It gave me the chance to practice what I was preparing to preach.

In the first reading we hear challenging and timely words about not oppressing the disadvantaged whether it be the stranger or the widow and orphan or others vulnerable people. And the unborn are certainly among the most vulnerable. While these words are challenging and should be pondered deeply, these are negative commands. They tell us what *not* to do. Briefly put, do not oppress or take advantage

of others. On a deeper level, it's been said that this calls us to see as God sees and yet these are still negative commands saying what we're *not* to do.

The gospel takes it to the next level. As important as it is not to harm or take advantage of our neighbor, there's more to being good than not being bad and there's more to loving our neighbor than not being cruel. Positive commands, like love your neighbor, are much more demanding than negative commands about what not to do but that's the higher standard to which Jesus calls us. With lives of intentional faith, informed by the word of God, assisted with prayer, encouraged by one another and nourished by the Eucharist, each day may we accept comforts and challenges that flow from loving God with all our being and our neighbor as our self. May that love of God and neighbor be the foundation of our lives and of all we do.