

30th Sunday Ordinary Time: October 25th, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Gospel Reflection

Once again this week, the Pharisees try to trick Jesus and, once again, he gives them an answer they don't expect. They asked what He thought was the greatest of the commandments and he gave them two. One might interpret that as meaning: loving God and loving your neighbor are equally important – or perhaps loving your neighbor is how you love God.

The word love is bandied about a lot with a lot of interpretations linked with feelings. Take the following well known phrases: "All you need is love", "How do I love thee, let me count the ways", and the famous, but ridiculous "Love means never having to say you are sorry." Somehow I don't think any of these capture the love of which Jesus was speaking. While there are certainly times when love makes us feel good, true love is hard work and can definitely involve intense suffering. Consider Jesus' ultimate act of love: torture and death. Scary thought and not likely one that entered the minds of the pharisees when they heard Jesus' answer.

So what is this love that is expected of us? Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians. Love is patient, love is kind, love is not jealous or conceited, rude or selfish. It does not take offense, nor is it resentful. It is always ready to trust, to excuse, and to endure whatever comes. Okay, so this is how we are to treat our neighbor? Well then, the pharisees ask in Luke's gospel, "Who is my neighbor?" Matthew leaves that more to us to discern, much like Jesus did. His answer was both indefinite on the one hand, but very explicit in a deeper sense.

If we consider Catholic Social Teaching and Pope Francis' most recent encyclical, [Fratelli Tutti](#), we can find some food for thought on who is our neighbor. In that encyclical, Pope Francis spends a lot of time considering the parable of the Good Samaritan and expounds on that as a description of who we should consider our neighbor. He says, "It is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters." [86]

If we take that to heart, we accept that everyone is our neighbor and we are to live in solidarity with all, especially those who are poor and in the most need. Consider what it means if we are to consider everyone our neighbor. That means we have to consider those who irritate us, who threaten us, who are on the opposite end of the political spectrum from us. Now you know why love is hard work and can be painful: because true love requires action, not just words or feelings. Are we up for it? We know that God is, and we are called to love Him and follow Him.