

31ST SUNDAY - ORD. (B) THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

One of the most abused words or misused in the world is the word LOVE. It is sometimes interchanged with LIKE. Many a time, we mean like and not love when we express affection for something or someone. Love is deeper than we think, because love is God Himself.

We are called upon, or we are reminded today, to love God and our neighbor. It is very important to examine what Moses told the Israelites, and what Jesus told the scribe. Jesus repeated what Moses told the Israelites: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." Jesus added the second which is like the first: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." From these, we realize that the commandment of love expects more than we think.

To love God is to fear Him, which means to revere Him, and to obey whatever He tells you. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; and to have wisdom is to know the mind of God and be able to do His will.

How does one love God with the whole heart, and soul, and might? From the heart comes good and evil. So to love God with the heart is to clean the heart of evil desires and fill it with what is good. One has to incline the heart according to God's will. In fact, the heart, the soul, and strength constitute the major components of the human being. This means one has to love God with the whole being. That is why Jesus told His disciples: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for his friends," (Jn.15:13).

This leads to the second commandment, love your neighbor as yourself. To love is to lay down your life for the other person. These two are the summary of the Ten commandments. The first three are about God, and the rest about our fellow human beings. We have to be concerned about the welfare of the other person even more than God. "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," (1Jn.4:20).

Why are we to love God and neighbor? It is because God first loved us and gave us His Son as our Redeemer, (1Jn.4:10), and each and every human being is a child of God created in His own image. Through Christ's death and resurrection, we have all become co-heirs to the kingdom.

St. Paul tells us what love is: "Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous, it is not arrogant, it is not conceited, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interest, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love never fails," (1Cor. 13:4-8).

What are the benefits of obeying the statutes of God and loving Him and one's neighbor? It brings growth and more prosperity, and one will inherit the land flowing with milk and honey, which is heaven; and this was what Moses told the Israelites. John also told the early believers: "Perfect love drives away fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love," (1Jn.4:18). Love also brings peace and harmony among people.

Considering what St. Paul told the Corinthians about love, can we say that we have love? If not, then we are not obeying the Commandments. Breaking even one of the ten is breaking all. We know all the commandments but does that mean that we obey all? Jesus told the scribe that he was not far from the kingdom, why? He realized he had knowledge of the commandments but he had to live accordingly.

We are called to put our interest aside and consider the interest of the other person. Is there any love in our world? Even among us Christians, how do we show our love towards the other Christian? What about husband and wife; children and parents; co-workers, and the stranger we don't know? It is always me first, the other person does not matter. Our attitude should be like that of Christ the High Priest who though He was the Son of God offered Himself as a living sacrifice for all. (Phi.2:5).