

LOVING GOD BY LOVING OTHERS

(30th Sunday OT A: Ex 22:20–26; 1 Th 1:5c–10; Mt 22:34–40) - Fr. John Sang Pham, CMF

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How do we know if we truly love God? Is it enough to pray regularly, attend Mass, and practise our religious devotions? These are all important, but they are not enough on their own. Our love for God must be seen not only in what we do at church, but also in how we treat one another every day. In today's Gospel, when Jesus is asked which commandment is the greatest, He replies: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”* Then He adds: *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”* (Mt 22:37–39). Jesus tells us that the whole Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments. In other words, love is at the heart of our faith. As Saint John reminds us, we cannot love God, whom we cannot see, if we fail to love the people we can see (1 Jn 4:20). **Two commandments, but one love: to love God with all our hearts and to show that love through the way we live.**

First, **to love God with all our hearts means putting Him first in our lives.** Jesus recalls the ancient prayer of Israel, the *Shema*: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one”* (Deut 6:4). Because there is only one God, we are called to love Him wholeheartedly, to trust Him, remain faithful to Him, and seek His will in everything we do. But loving God is more than saying the right words. It is reflected in our daily choices: choosing God's will over our own, honesty over dishonesty, and forgiveness over resentment. As Jesus says: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). **Loving God is not simply about giving Him some of our time. It is about allowing Him to guide our whole lives.**

However, **our love for God cannot be complete without love for our neighbour.** In today's first reading, God tells His people not to mistreat foreigners, widows, or orphans, or exploit the poor. He hears the cries of those who suffer and calls us to care for them. Jesus reminds us: *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”* (Mt 25:40). **We cannot claim to love God while turning a blind eye to the suffering of others.** But sometimes, those who need our love most are the people closest to us. We may be polite to strangers, yet easily lose our temper with our own family. We may be kind to others, but impatient towards our parents, spouses, or children. Some parents spend their lives caring for their children, only to feel forgotten in old age. Some married couples have lived together for years, yet even a simple “thank you” has become rare. Some brothers and sisters no longer speak because of a misunderstanding. **We may live under the same roof, yet our hearts can grow cold.** So perhaps we need to ask ourselves: **Do the people closest to us experience God's love through the way we treat them?**

And this brings us to another important truth: **loving God means allowing His love to change us.** In today's second reading, Saint Paul praises the Thessalonians because they *“turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God”* (1 Thes 1:9). Their faith transformed their lives and made them an example to others. Today, our idols may be money, success, pride, or selfishness. Sometimes, what prevents us from loving and forgiving is our unwillingness to let go of our pride. If we truly love God, that love should be reflected in our relationships. Husbands and wives are called to love and support one another. Parents are called to raise their children with love and good example. Children are called to respect and care for their parents, especially as they grow older. Loving others is not always easy. There may be painful memories and wounds that take time to heal. That is why we need God's grace to help us to love, forgive, and begin again. **True faith should not simply make us more religious. It should make us more loving.**

Dear brothers and sisters, **loving God and loving others cannot be separated.** And when loving others is difficult, God's love gives us the strength to keep trying. As we leave Mass today, perhaps each of us can make one small act of love: a phone call, a word of apology, an act of forgiveness, or a simple gesture of kindness. **As we receive the Eucharist, may we also become bread broken for others.** For the most beautiful way to say, “Lord, I love You,” is to live in such a way that the people around us can experience His love through us. Amen.