

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A) *The One Thing*

A pastor was giving a children's homily and asked the kids, *"Can anyone tell me what it means to love your neighbor?"*

A seven-year-old girl raised her hand and said, *"It means being nice to the people who live next door!"* The pastor smiled and said, *"That's right! And how do we show them love?"*

She thought for a second and said, *"By praying that they move away so nice people can live there!"*

It's easy to love humanity in theory... it's the actual people next door that make it difficult! Yet, our faith, our Church, our entire purpose—everything we are about—can be summarized in that one word: **LOVE**.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the summary of the entire Law and the Prophets: to Love God and to Love your neighbor. We can sum it up in one sentence: **Love is the one thing**. It is the primary commandment; it is the ultimate requirement.

Now, if you had questions or were confused before stepping into Mass today... just wait, it could get worse! Because we have to ask ourselves: What does it actually mean to love God and to love our neighbor? What does it mean for me personally? And how do we actually do it?

To understand how to love God and neighbor, we have to define our terms. **What is love?**

Love is not just an emotion or a warm feeling. The Church and sacred tradition tell us that to love is **to will the good of another**. In other words, love is an action. It means desiring the absolute best for someone else and actively working to make it happen.

If love means willing the good of another, how do we love God? How can we "will the good" for God when God is already goodness itself?

We look to what He has revealed. Through the sacrifice of the Cross, Jesus revealed that to love God is to worship Him and Him alone. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* And what are His commandments? To love God and to love our neighbor! It might sound like we're moving in a circular motion: We love God by keeping His commandments, and His commandment is to love! But when we look closer, we see God's ultimate desire: He has revealed that His will is for everyone to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth. Therefore, to love God is to worship Him, to embrace His will, and to desire the salvation of every human soul.

That brings us to the second part of the commandment: **How do I love my neighbor?**

Loving my neighbor is to will the best for my neighbor. And what is the best thing for my neighbor? It is God Himself—His salvation, His peace, and the full knowledge of His truth.

Then the question becomes: **Who is my neighbor?** Remember the Parable of the Good Samaritan, where a scholar of the law asked Jesus, *"And who is my neighbor?"*

Is my neighbor just my physical neighbor? Those on my block? Those in my immediate circle of influence? Is it my friends and family? Foreigners? The rich and the poor? The marginalized and the privileged? The housed and the unhoused?

Is it Democrats, Republicans, Independents, affiliated and unaffiliated, voters and non-voters? Is it the single, married, divorced, widowed, elderly, young, and children? Is it the tall, short, abled,

disabled, homosexual, heterosexual, white, colored, indigenous—those I like, and those I dislike?

Are *they* my neighbors? **YES.**

A neighbor is not defined by boundary lines, shared politics, or mutual affection. A neighbor is defined by inherent human dignity and the opportunity to show compassion, justice, and mercy whenever a need presents itself. To love your neighbor is to want the ultimate best for them: God, His salvation, and the light of His truth.

If you love God, you *will* love your neighbor, because God is love. And when you love your neighbor, you are loving God, because the image of God is present in your neighbor.

How does this look in practice?

In today's first reading from the Book of Exodus, as the people of Israel were heading toward the Promised Land, the Lord commanded them: Do not oppress the foreigner. Take care of the widows and the orphans. Do not extort. Help those in need. Be compassionate.

Our Lord has a deeply compassionate heart and a special affinity for the poor, the marginalized, and the suffering. He challenges us that if we truly love Him, we must love our neighbor through concrete action—by extending aid, offering help, and embodying mercy.

The Church in her wisdom gives us actionable ways to put this love into practice: **the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.** They are our roadmap for turning love from a pious sentiment into an active lifestyle. The one thing needed is love. And because the ultimate good is God, the highest act of love we can perform is to be **Christlike.**

In today's second reading from the Letter to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul calls us to be imitators of the Lord so that we can become role models for others, drawing them into the love of Christ.

But we have to ask ourselves: How can others desire to know God and His truth if we are not living it? How can we attract them to God if we fail to represent His love? How can I invite someone to meet my Lord if I do not truly know Him myself? How can I ask someone to love God if I am not loving Him in my daily life?

Consider the state of our world today. We live in a culture that echoes a troubling paradox:

We pray for peace in the world, while waging ideological wars in our hearts and on our screens.

We seek a God made in our own preferred image—tailored to our politics, our tribes, and our comforts—while ignoring the image of God stamped upon our enemy. We say we love a God whom we cannot see, yet find endless excuses to reject the neighbor whom we do see.

These are the days of talking a lot and saying very little. These are the days of seeing a need, and expecting someone else to take action.

Our faith, our Church, our journey, our purpose—it can all be summarized in one single word: **LOVE.**

The Lord place the question directly before your heart and mine:

Do you love God... and do you love your neighbor?