

# Sunday, October 25, 2020

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

#### Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Exodus 22:20-26

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Responsorial: Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

## What Does it Mean to Love God and Neighbor?

*Love the Lord. . . . Love your neighbor. (Matthew 22:37, 39)*

What a rough day! From the start, Jesus had to contend with groups of religious leaders trying to trip him up. First came the chief priests and scribes, then some Pharisees, followed by some Sadducees, followed by even more Pharisees. And all the while, Jesus was trying to preach to the people—including “the blind and the lame”—who had gathered around him (Matthew 21:14).

How ironic! Jesus faced a parade of dignitaries trying to trap him instead of asking how they could better care for the people surrounding him. Their very actions showed how blind they were to what it really meant to love God (Jesus) or their neighbor (the people). Of course, we shouldn't single them out as especially evil or misguided. We can all point to times when we have overlooked opportunities to love, even when they are staring us in the face.

Why would that be? Part of the reason is that we may have a narrow definition of Jesus' command to love. We might tend to reduce loving God to attending Mass or getting our prayer times in—walled-off situations that are limited in time and not very demanding. As for loving our neighbor, we can fall into the trap of deciding for ourselves who our “neighbor” is. Maybe he's our husband but not the coworker who rubs us the wrong way. Maybe she's our sister but not the in-law who is always offering her advice, whether we want it or not.

Jesus came to expose the indifference that lies at the heart of our failures to love. But he didn't stop there. He also overcame it as only he could: by pouring himself out in love for us. May we take up his example and pour ourselves out as well.

*“Jesus, teach me to love all my neighbors.”*

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words from the Lord: *You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.* He continues with these words: *If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset.... If he cries out to me, I will hear him.*
  - Why do you think the Lord's compassion towards the plight of the alien, widow, orphan, and poor neighbors is so strong?
  - Why do you think his wrath towards anyone who wrongs or extorts these groups of people is also so strong?
  - How does your attitude and actions towards the poor and needy compare to the Lord's compassion? What more can you do so that your compassion would be more like the Lord's?
2. The responsorial psalm opens with these words: *I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!* The psalm closes with these words: *Praised be the Lord, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies. The Lord lives and blessed be my rock! Extolled be God my savior. You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed.*
  - In the opening words, the Lord is called *my strength*, plus *my rock, my fortress, my deliverer* and *my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold*. What do these mean to you?
  - What examples from your own life can you give of any of these descriptions for how the Lord has acted?
  - In what ways are the closing words a logical follow-up to the opening words?
  - During the day, how often do you say words like *Praised be the Lord, blessed be my rock*, or *Extolled be God my savior* because he keeps you *safe from my enemies* and has *showed kindness*? Is there room for improvement?
3. The second reading begins with these words: *"Brothers and sisters: You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.* He also praises them for how they *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven.*
  - What are some of the reasons that St. Paul gives for his words of praise for the Thessalonians?
  - How would you rate yourself as a Christian imitator *of the Lord* and *a model for all the believers* and others?
  - What needs to happen in your life to make you an even better imitator and model?
  - How have you *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven*?
4. In the Gospel reading, a scholar of the law tested Jesus by asking, *"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"* Jesus answered with these words: *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."*
  - 1 John 4:19 says that our ability to love God and others is a response to his having loved us first. *"We love because he first loved us."* What can you do in your times of prayer to focus more on knowing God's love for you, so you can *love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*?
  - The second greatest commandment is *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. What needs to change in the way you relate to your family or others, so that you can love them the way God wants you to love them?
  - Why do you think *The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments*?
5. The meditation is a reflection on these words from the Gospel reading: *Love the Lord. . . . Love your neighbor* (Matthew 22:37, 39). It describes some of the reasons "why we have overlooked opportunities to love" as follows: *"Part of the reason is that we may have a narrow definition of Jesus' command to love. We might tend to reduce loving God to attending Mass or getting our prayer times in . . . As for loving our neighbor, we can fall into the trap of deciding for ourselves who our "neighbor" is. Maybe he's our husband but not the coworker who rubs us the wrong way. Maybe she's our sister but not the in-law who is always offering her advice, whether we want it or not.*
  - How would you rate yourself on the reasons given on why you fail to *Love the Lord. . . . Love your neighbor*?
  - What are some other reasons that can get in the way?
  - How would you rate yourself on any tendencies "to reduce loving God to attending Mass or getting our prayer times? In other words, do you treat them as a list of things to check off before moving on with your day?"

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be faithful to his command to *love your neighbor as yourself*. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

*"Jesus, teach me to love all my neighbors."*

[Maurice Blumberg is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization ([www.christlife.org](http://www.christlife.org)), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal ([www.nsc-chariscenter.org](http://www.nsc-chariscenter.org)), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* ([www.wau.org](http://www.wau.org)), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He is also a current leader of his parish ChristLife, Healing, and Men's Ministries. He can be contacted at [mblumberg@aol.com](mailto:mblumberg@aol.com).]