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THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

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SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Number of Those Who Love Their Neighbor Is Very Small

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." St. Matthew. 22:39

This is the great law of Charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor;" these words teach us whom we are to love. "As thyself;" how and in what manner we are to love. This law, though well known by all, is understood by very few; for most people show by their conduct that they know little of what is meant by that law. There are many nowadays who ask with the lawyer: "And who is my neighbor?" So rare is the true love of one's neighbor that people neither know nor care to know who their neighbor is; still less do they know what it means to love him as themselves. Since so much depends on the fulfillment of this law that without it it is impossible to love God, I shall endeavor to explain it today:

I. Who my neighbor is.

II. What it means to love one's neighbor as one's self.

"And who is my neighbor?" Is it only my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, my friends and relatives? No, although all these are closely related to you, there is still another who is a close connection of yours, and who has a valid claim on your love. "There is no relationship so close as that which exists between man and man!" Whoever, therefore, in the whole wide world has human nature, is a neighbor of all of us, no matter who or what he is. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor;" this is a general law binding all men, which admits of no exception. It says to you and to me, and to us all: "Thou shalt love:" whom? "Thy neighbor." And who is he? Every human being, without exception; because we all belong to the same race; we have all the same origin, the nothingness of which we are created; the same Creator, who is the Almighty God; the same nature, which is the likeness of God; the same Father, who is in heaven; the same Mother, the true Church, to which all men are called; the same spiritual food and drink, which is prepared for all, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; the same hope, the same end, the same inheritance, the same heaven. God, in order to preserve this fellowship amongst men, and thereby to foster mutual charity amongst them, did not create the great and the rich out of one material and the poor and needy of another, but He caused us all, without exception, to descend from the one father, Adam, and our first mother, Eve. He did not create her independently, but took the material of which he made her from Adam, so that no one can treat another as a stranger, and no difference of nationality, family, condition, or manners, which generally is a cause of misunderstanding and difficulties, can excuse us from the obligation of loving all human beings, and looking on them as our brothers and sisters.

How rare is true charity amongst us; for what is more difficult to find than this general love? What a circumscribed meaning is given nowadays to the word neighbor! Into what small parts we divide, and how

miserly we are in doling out, our love and friendship! I find only three classes of men who receive any share of it. The first class founds its claim on blood-relationship, and consists of those who belong to the same family as we do; the second relies on our own interest, and consists of those who have done us good, or are likely to do us good; the third and principal class consists of those who stilt our natural inclination, because they are beautiful or amiable in our eyes, or are endowed with great natural gifts and talents, or have a pleasing manner, or a sympathetic disposition, or because we have a special pleasure in the society of those of whose favor and friendship we are assured. These are the people who generally monopolize our hearts and affections, and all the others are excluded; no one thinks of them. Hence, as there are few in the world who are related to us, fewer still from whom we have received or expect to receive benefits, and fewest of all who, without any fault or failing, are perfectly suited to our inclination, it follows clearly that the number of human beings in the world whom we love properly is very small indeed.

A clear example of our conduct in this particular I find in the First Book of Kings, in Nabal. He was a wealthy man, but very hard-hearted, unmerciful, and wicked. David, who, with his followers, happened to be in his neighborhood, sent to him to ask him in a friendly manner for provisions; but the churlish and foolish Nabal answered: "Who is David? and what is the son of Isai?" I know him not; what have I to do with him? "Shall I, then, take my bread and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are?" (I Kings 25:10, 11.) That is generally the way in which we talk when there is question of showing charity, according to the Christian law, to the poor, the lowly, and the unknown. And when we are bound by that law to speak and act in a friendly manner to them, to do them a kindness, and to help them in their necessities, what, we say, who are they? They are nothing to me; I know not where they come from; I have never had anything to do with them; why should I do them a kindness? What! you do not know where they come from?

Do you know where you come from yourself? As to your soul, you come from nothing, and so do they; as to your body, you are made of a handful of earth, so are they; you come from the hand of God your Creator, and so do they; you know not where they come from? Do you know where you and they are going to? Every day you are going to death, and so are they; you are hurrying on to eternity, nor have they any other end; you hope to get to heaven, so do they, and perhaps they will succeed and you will be disappointed; you are all in the same danger; you have all the same hope, and therefore you are in the same condition, and you owe them the Christian and brotherly love of charity, as well as you owe it to your friends and relatives.

On the last day Christ will reckon up all the works of Christian charity that have been performed, in order to reward them duly. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you covered me; sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me" (St. Matthew 25:34, 36). And all this "you did to me" (Ibid. 40), and for my sake. Now, come forward with that love of yours and hear judgment pronounced on it. You have done good to your neighbor, but why? Because you were in want of his help or assistance? But Christ will say to you, if you had no other object but that: you did it not to me, but to yourself and for your own end. You have visited a sick person; why? Through worldly courtesy, because he was an acquaintance of yours, or because you considered his friendship useful to you, or because you expected him to remember you in his will? If that was your only intention, you have not visited me. You have given alms to a poor man; why? That he might work for you? You have not given it to me. You have clothed one who was naked; why? Because he was your relative, or a countryman of yours? Then you have not clothed me. You have borne an insult meekly and silently, or been patient with the troublesome faults of another, or repressed your anger when he contradicted or spoke harshly to you; why? Because he was stronger than you, or you were afraid of incurring his resentment? You did it not to me; it was not for my sake that you were so patient. You helped one who was in need by your interest, good advice, or consolation; why? Because you had a natural liking for him? You did it not to me. You were good-humored, friendly and agreeable with that person; why? Because he pleased you? Then you have not sought to please me by your conduct to him. In a word, if you have loved your neighbor because he pleased you, and loved you in return, you did it not for me, not for my sake. If you had done all this on my account and in obedience to my command, you would have loved all men without exception, because I commanded you to love your neighbor, that is, all mankind. And how are we to love all mankind?

II. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" not with exactly the same affection that you have for yourself. No; for well-ordered charity begins with one's self. To sacrifice one's property, to shed one's blood, to give one's life for another, is often the effect of a heroic charity, but is seldom a duty or an obligation. I can love myself more than others in temporal things, and I must love myself more than all others in things that concern my eternal salvation. The law of charity, then, points to a certain likeness and similarity, so that the love I bear to myself should guide me as to the love I must have for my neighbor. The Holy Scripture, in order to guard us from error on this point, lays down two very clear rules, one of which shows us what we have to avoid, the other what we have to do. The first was given by the elder Tobias to his son: "See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another" (Tob. 4:16). The second was given by our Lord Jesus Christ to his Apostles; "All things, therefore, whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them. For this is the law" (St. Matthew 7:22); that is the way to love your neighbor as yourself.

But do we observe that? I find two classes of people who err grievously in this matter; for some are too prodigal of their love, and others are too miserly with it; some do too much, others too little; some love their neighbor more, others less than themselves.

1. You say or do something unlawful, to please another; you love your neighbor too much, more than yourself. To avoid displeasing another you omit doing or saying what the duties of your state oblige you to do or say; you love that person too much, more than yourself. To avoid interrupting a conversation, you join in and approve of impure or uncharitable talk; you love others too much, more than yourself. Through human respect you transgress the law of God; you love others too much, more than yourself. A father scrapes together all the money he can, and even tries to get possession of what he has no right to, that at his death he may leave his dear son well off.

Father, you love your son too much, more than yourself! A mother, not wishing to displease her daughter, allows her to keep dangerous company, to be present at promiscuous nightly gatherings, and to go into other occasions of sin. Mother, you love your daughter too much, more than yourself! Neither father nor mother will punish their children when they do wrong, nor do they bring them up in the fear of God, or teach them how to work for the salvation of their souls, and thus they fail in performing the most important duty that God has imposed on those who enter the married state. Parents, you love your children too much, more than yourselves! In a word, he who commits even a single sin, or omits one good action to please another, sins against the law of charity by prodigality. And why? Because he loves his neighbor, not as himself, but more than himself, more than his conscience, his soul, his salvation, his God; or, as the Gospel says, he hates himself mortally, that he may love another foolishly and unreasonably. And how many people of that kind there are in the world! I might look for a long time, and I should hardly find one in thousands who would be willing to share his wealth with me through Christian charity; and there is many a one who would find hundreds ready to sacrifice their consciences, their souls, their salvation, for his sake. All these people love others too much, more than themselves.

2. But there are others who love their neighbor far too little. I think a great deal of myself, feel the least slight very keenly, have a vain-complacency in all my undertakings, and am firmly persuaded that everything I do is well done; meanwhile I look down upon all that another does, and I despise him in my heart, I criticise and find fault with him, and put a bad interpretation on all his actions; it is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am so sensitive that I cannot bear the least word of contradiction, and yet I speak to another very bitterly and sarcastically; I do not love him as myself. I often complain that this or that person has refused to do me a kindness; yet I hardly ever do anything for another person who asks me to help him; I do not love him as myself. I wish that people should bear everything from me, but I cannot bear the least thing from them; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am often vexed during the day at the natural faults and awkwardness of another, and I have many great faults which others must overlook patiently and meekly; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I abhor and condemn many men because they are wicked and sinful, but I do not hate and condemn the sins which I myself commit every day; I do not love my neighbor as myself. When others do wrong I wish to see them severely punished, but I do not punish myself; I do not love my neighbor as myself. I am naturally kind to myself; why am I not so to others? I am naturally severe and harsh to others; why am I not so to myself? It is evident that I do not love my neighbor as myself.

Indeed, we have very little love for our neighbor, although we are bound to love him; and we are far from loving him as we ought. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ has told us clearly, emphatically, and frequently, that we are bound to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Gospels and the Epistles are full of the laws of charity. “These things I command you, that you love one another” (St. John 15:17). This was the last prayer of our Lord to his heavenly Father when he was about to take leave of his Apostles: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are” (St. John 17:11). This was his last exhortation to his Apostles, and in their person to all of us: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Alas! where is the fervor of the early Christians, who were so exact in fulfilling this law? The Christian faith was known in those days more by the brotherly love of charity it produced than by the miracles it wrought; for, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, in spite of the differences of race and nationality, “the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them.” This fact alone convinced the heathens of the truth of the Christian religion, and they used to say to each other with astonishment:

“See how those men love one another.” If the heathens were to come into many modern Christian towns would they see the same proof of the truth of our religion? Could they say with truth: “See how those men love one another”? Would they not rather have reason to think and to say: See how those men hate each other? See what misunderstandings, quarrels and disputes there are amongst them! See how they curse, and persecute, and try to ruin each other!

Do you think you love God if you hate even one man? St. John will tell you that, if you think so, you are a liar. “If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.” And do you think that God loves you? You are mistaken; for if a man love not his brother, “how doth the charity of God abide in him?” Of what use will all your devotions and good works be if you do not love your neighbor? If you do not love him as yourself? “He that loveth not, abideth in death” (I John 4:14). If you gave up all you have in order to follow Jesus; if you scourged yourself every day for his sake, so as to draw blood, what good would it all be to you if you love not your neighbor? Not the least; you can save your soul and be loved by God without this poverty and all these extraordinary austerities and devotions. But unless you love your neighbor you can hope neither to save your soul nor to gain his love. Amen.

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