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*This is my commandment, that you love one another.*

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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 +++

VOL. III = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Motives for Loving Our Neighbor

*“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” St. Matthew 22:39*

This love of our neighbor is as rare among men as the love of God, even amongst those who imagine they love their neighbor. For in what narrow limits they confine that love! Friends, relations, benefactors, and those who agree with our opinions and suit our fancies, generally share all our love among them. All others we look on as strangers; and if a work of Christian charity is required in their behalf, Oh, we think and say, what is the man to me? I do not know him; I owe him nothing; he has not deserved anything from me; I cannot bear him, nor suffer to be in his company. Christians! Is that not contrary to the words of the law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” that is, all men, no matter who they are. Why so?

I. *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, no matter who he is; because in himself he is worthy of your love.*

II. *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, no matter who he is; because Christ deserves that, for his sake, you should love your neighbor.*

I. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor,” O man! O Christian! That is, each and every one in the world without exception. Do you wish to know the reason why you should love him? No matter what his outward appearance may be or his inward disposition, no matter how ragged, poor, lowly, abject, miserable, unknown he may seem, he is a living image of the mighty Monarch of heaven and earth; he has in his body a soul as beautiful as an angel, in which is reflected the likeness of God. That soul is an original of the God of infinite wisdom, knowledge, and power, nor has any one laid a hand on it but God himself, nor does it owe its origin to any one but God; it is made for nothing else but God; it has no other end and aim but God, no other resting-place but God, and expects no other reward but God. That soul is an original which cannot be bought or sold for any price less than the life blood of God. In what great honor and esteem the human soul must be held! Parents, be careful of the precious souls of your children, that they may not be lost forever! Christians, labor every day with the utmost diligence for the salvation of your immortal souls: for that is the only necessary business you have to attend to, as long as you are on this earth! Christians, I add as a conclusion to be drawn from this honor and love your neighbor who is such a beautiful image of God. For if a lifeless picture, that is made of worthless colors, is esteemed and honored merely because it represents some great man or good friend, or because it is a celebrated work of art, what honor and love are not due to the master-piece of God’s hand, which is a living image of God? When the young Tobias presented himself before Raphael, the latter, although he had never

before seen him, at once received him with the utmost love and friendship, because he saw that his features resembled those of the elder Tobias, whom he loved dearly, not merely on account of relationship, but also on account of his excellent character. O Christians, when we consider our neighbor in the light of faith, we, too, must acknowledge and say:

How like this man is to our God of infinite beauty! And when we have thus considered him, provided we love God, must we not confess that, on that account alone, there is not one in the world who is not worthy of esteem and love? But there is a much closer connection and relationship between us, by which we are bound to love each other mutually. All *human beings are brothers and sisters*; we are all children of one father, not only because we are descended from the same father Adam, according to the flesh, but also because, by the far more excellent birth of the soul, we are children of our eternal Father, who is in heaven. "Have we not all one father?" said God by the prophet Malachy to the priests of the Old Law, who in their hearts despised the common people; "Hath not one God created us? Why, then, doth every one of us despise his brother?" (Malach. 2:10.) If men were bound to love each other with fraternal affection in the Old Law, what love and union are not required amongst us Christians by the New Law, that most perfect and all-holy law of love published by Jesus Christ? For we are born again in the blood of Christ, adopted as children of God, and thus related, we cry out unanimously to heaven, as our Saviour himself has taught us, as our elder Brother: "Our Father, who art in heaven." Nor does each one who prays say "my Father," but "our Father," so that, whenever we pray, we must remember that we are all brothers and sisters, who have the one heavenly Father. We do not say, give me this day my daily bread; forgive me my trespasses; lead me not into temptation; deliver me from evil; but, give us our daily bread; forgive us our trespasses. Why? "We pray for all the people, because all the people are one," to show that we must foster a mutual love as if we were but one individual, and had but one heart, mind, and will; therefore, the good I wish myself I must also wish all; and what I do not wish to happen to myself I must desire to avert from others, according to the practice of the early Christians: "And 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" (Acts 4:32).

That love and union of hearts should exist amongst us Christians because we are all brothers and sisters, children of one Father; and also because we have only one mother, the holy Catholic Church, in and from which we receive spiritual life from God. For by Baptism we are born again in Christ, we are brought up from our youth in the holy doctrine and teaching of the Church, we are fed like comrades at the same table, and our food and drink is the precious, adorable flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

And we are all traveling companions, who are going on the same road to the same fatherland, namely, to heaven, where our Almighty Father and many of our brothers and sisters, who have gone before, await us, that being united with them in the most perfect love, we may enjoy the same inheritance with them, and possess the same eternal joys. The inheritance that children expect after the death of their parents in this life is often a cause of strife, disunion, and contention between brothers and sisters. And is that to be wondered at; for since the amount to be left them is limited, the greater the number of children, the less the share that comes to each one, while, on the other hand, each wishes to have the best and largest share; thus arise envy and jealousy, quarrelling and contention, hatred and enmity, if there is only a suspicion that the inheritance is not fairly divided. But it is quite different with what we have to expect from our Father in heaven; for it is infinite and inexhaustible, and cannot be lessened or diminished by any number of claimants. Each one shall have as his portion the infinite God himself, whom we shall all possess together; so that our inheritance shall be a bond to unite the hearts of the elect in intimate and joyful love. From this I conclude, that my neighbor, no matter who he may be, is worthy of my love, since he is a human being created for the same end as myself, to love me and be loved by me for all eternity.

Nay, should we not do that which is the cause of the utmost happiness to us here on earth? For if each one loved his neighbor as himself, what a wonderful change there would be in the world! Almost all vice would be abolished; almost everything that troubles our heart and minds would be removed. Pride and vanity, which now make us seek and extol ourselves above others; avarice and the concupiscence of the eyes, which are the cause of so many injustices on account of that wretched "mine and thine," and that occasions so much quarrelling and contention, the fruitful source of revengeful feelings, envy, jealousy, irreconcilable hatred, persecution, oppression, calumny, detraction, cursing, swearing, wars, and murders; these capital sins, which are the sources

and causes of all the troubles and trials of life, would all be removed, if Christian, brotherly love reigned in our hearts: each one would honor and esteem his neighbor as himself, would wish and do good to him as to himself, would rejoice at his prosperity as at his own, and help him in danger and necessity as he would wish to be helped himself. All would have the same wish without the least fear or suspicion of being envied, cheated, betrayed, or injured by another; in a word, the world would become a picture of the future heavenly Jerusalem, which will be a dwelling of the most perfect repose, union, and peace; because there the most perfect love will unite all hearts together.

Let us blot out all the other titles, that our being children of God, brothers and sisters of the same Father and Mother, comrades at table and traveling companions, co-heirs to the kingdom of heaven, and let us suppose, moreover, that there is absolutely nothing in our neighbor to make him worthy of our love; Jesus Christ well deserves that for his sake we should love our neighbor.

II. Amongst all the commandments of God there is none that Jesus Christ took more interest in, or inculcated on all men more earnestly by word and example, than the law which commands us *to love our neighbor*.

1. He puts it in the same rank as the law that commands us to love our sovereign God. "Master," said the lawyer "which is the great commandment in the law?" And the answer was: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Christ makes, as it were, no distinction between the love of God and the love of our neighbor, although there is an infinite difference between God and man. He holds one love in as high esteem as the other, as if to say; to love God and to love your neighbor is the same thing in my eyes. Nay, it would seem as if the Apostle preferred to some extent the law of the love of our neighbor to that of the love of God, for he says that the whole law is fulfilled by him who loves his neighbor: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law (Rom. 13:8). For all the law is fulfilled in one word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'" (Gal. 5:14). The meaning of the Apostle is, not that a man who blasphemes God, swears falsely, does not observe the fast-days, still keeps the whole law if he only loves his neighbor, but that a man who, for God's sake, has a sincere love for his neighbor, will not offend the Lord by any kind of sin, so that he will keep all the other commandments as well. It is necessary for us to love our neighbor, as well as to love God. He wills us to love our neighbor for his sake; from which it follows that it is impossible for me to obey this command unless I love God. By the love of God the love of our neighbor is generated, and by the love of our neighbor the love of God is nourished; for he who neglects to love God is certainly unable to love his neighbor. And St. John says straight out that he who does not love his neighbor cannot love God: "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God loves also his brother."

2. Again, Christ calls this commandment his commandment: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." Not that the fulfillment of the other points of the law is of no importance in his sight, or that he does not care if we keep the other commandments; but he wishes to recommend this one commandment of love to us in a special manner, as the foundation of his holy Gospel, and an object most pleasing to his Sacred Heart; not otherwise than as a father who has several children, says of one of them this is his mother's son, but this is my son. He does not wish thereby to intimate that the other children are not his too; his meaning is, that of all his children the one whom he thus singles out is his favorite, and the object of his special care. In the same sense, Christ says, "this is my commandment," the one which is dearest to me, "that you love one another." Therefore, when the disciples of St. John complained that they had always to hear the same exhortation from their master, "My little children, love one another," and they consequently desired something new, St. John said to them that he knew nothing better; "for it is the precept of the Lord, and if it is observed, it will be enough."

3. Christ calls it a new law: "A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another." But why does he say that? This commandment is as old as the world; for the law of nature bound the first men to brotherly love and friendly intercourse with one another; while the Law of Moses contains the express words: "Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself" (Lev. 19:18): and at all times the law was: "Do unto others as you wish they should do unto you." Hatred, anger, vindictiveness, injustice, detraction, contumely, cursing and swearing, deceit and treachery are vices that were always forbidden. Meekness and charity, compassion for the miserable, generosity towards the poor, readiness to help others in their necessities, are virtues to which men were always

bound. Why, then, does Christ say, as if he was bringing forward something novel, “A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another?” It is a new commandment, because it is to be kept in a new manner, on account of a new title, and a new motive. Our Lord’s meaning was: hitherto you have received this commandment from God as your Creator and sovereign Lord, whom you are bound to obey, either through fear of eternal punishment, or through hope of an eternal reward but now I command you anew to love one another as your Redeemer, who will give my life’s blood for you; as your Brother, who will make you children of my Father, who has thus adopted you as my brethren with the prayer and the command that you love one another on my account and for my sake. And if hitherto neither the hope of reward, nor the fear of punishment, nor the authority of your Legislator could inspire you with that love, you should, at all events, practice it for the sake of the love that you owe your Redeemer and Saviour; for I command you anew to love one another, and I enforce that commandment with all my authority: for my sake you must love one another.

4. We would do well to note the time and the circumstances in which he so specially inculcated this command on his disciples. When was it? On the very night of the Last Supper, when he gave them his last will and testament. Before he went to his death he said to them: “These things I command, that you love one another” (St. John 15:17). When a father is at the point of death, he calls his children to his bed-side to give them his last exhortations; what he then says to them is generally what they are most inclined to observe; and it remains, too, most deeply impressed on the memories of the children. Oh, they say, after ten or twenty years, or more, this or that was enjoined on me by my father on his death-bed; I must never forget it during my whole life; I must faithfully observe it, and never act contrary to it. And if any one tries to hinder them from fulfilling their father’s last words, they exclaim at once, “What? Must I not do that which my dear father commanded me with his last breath? Must I not observe the last injunction that he laid on me, when about to depart from this life?” Now, what should be the power of the last words of Christ with his heirs? Love one another, he says, my children, do not forget it; this is the commandment that I, your dying Father, give you; this is the expression of my will before I am nailed to the cross for you: “These things I command you, that you love one another.”

5. The surest sign by which the disciple and follower of Christ is to be known is brotherly love: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another” (St. John 13:34). He does not require miracles or prodigies; but he says: “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” All other things are only deceitful signs of a disciple; but this love is a true one and cannot deceive.

In return for the countless benefits that we have received and continue to receive from him, the only return of gratitude that our Lord requires of us is, that we should love our neighbor; for he puts our neighbor in his own place, and says that whatever we do to him he shall accept it as if it were done to himself: “So long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me” (St. Matthew 25:40). He protests that he who injures his neighbor injures the apple of his eye, that is the tenderest and dearest member of his sacred body: “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye” (Zach. 2:8). On the last day Christ will forget everything that was done either to please or displease him, and will bring forward the works of charity that have been performed or omitted with regard to one’s neighbor, as the sole reason for reward or punishment. “Come, ye blessed,” he will say to the just, “possess the kingdom prepared for you.” Why? “For I was hungry and you gave me to eat.” “Depart from me, you cursed.” Why? For I was hungry and you gave me not to eat. “So long as you did it to one of these, my least brethren, you did it to me.”

Where are you now who so often say, when a work of charity is expected of you: What is the man to me? I do not know him; I owe him nothing: he has deserved nothing from me; I cannot bear him. What? Is, then, Jesus Christ nothing to you? Do you not know your Saviour? Do you owe him nothing? Has the Son of God deserved nothing from you? Can you not bear Jesus? You must know, then, that what you have given or refused to that man you have given or refused to Christ. Even if the man is not worthy of your love, certainly Jesus Christ deserves that you should love him for his sake. Depict your neighbor in the blackest colors; say that he is worthless, good-for-nothing, wicked man, whom no one can bear; say that he does all the mischief that lies in his power; no matter how you described him, it still remains true that Christ has said of him, that what you do to such a man you have done to himself; and, therefore, it is true, that Christ is well deserving that you should love even such a man for his sake.

“But before all things,” I conclude in the words of St. Peter, “have a constant mutual charity among yourselves” (1 Pet. 4:8). Before all things, before all other works of devotion, before all that you do, be sure that you foster this mutual love. Your neighbor, as the image of God, as your brother, as your comrade and traveling companion, as your co-heir to the kingdom of heaven, is well deserving of that love. Love one another; it is the command of the Lord, the special and dearest law of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who has commanded us to love our neighbor in his place, and who will give us a clear receipt for all we owe him, if we only love our neighbor. Amen.

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