

Homily for 30th Sunday

Wholeness is presented in the form of a journey – we become whole by moving from fragmentation to wholeness. This is a crucial message for our times since fragmentation is one of the characteristics of our modern Western culture and the journey to wholeness one of its greatest challenges. Wholeness therefore defines our Christian mission today. Our special contribution to the modern world is to help ourselves and one another make the journey to wholeness – and the readings show us how this is achieved. In the gospel reading we see a cumulative effect is intended – “your whole self” in loving God. The real stress is on “all” which means in the concrete “more than to any person, thing or cause”. To know that God is love, and that we should respond to him in love is a source of great comfort, great hope, great consolation. To love God is to acknowledge the source of meaning and purpose. To love God is to embrace the truth. To love God is to glory and wonder at all that he has made. He encourages us in our lives. He guides us in the decisions we must take. A pastor was speaking to a Sunday school class about the things money can't buy. “It can't buy laughter and it can't buy love” he told them. Driving his point home, he said, “What would you do if I offered you £1000 not to love your mother and father?” Stunned silence ensued. Finally, a small voice queried, “How much would you give me not to love my big sister?” In his letter Paul emphasized how the people had abandoned their idols to serve the true living God. The word idol in this case meant the false gods that did not exist. In a true conversion, the Christian lives the love of God, truly being the Christian that he claims to be. Love of God means putting Him first, respecting His Name, and keeping His Day [the Sabbath; Sunday for us] holy. Love of God transforms lives every waking moment of every day.

Once God is first for us we will find that love of our neighbour becomes our “greatest commandment”. The two obligations “resemble each other”, meaning that we now choose to give our whole selves to our neighbour. According to the philosophy of individualism the greatest commandment is to look after ourselves, to seek prosperity for our immediate families and for our countries. To defend that commandment, we quote scientists and doctors and lawyers, allying ourselves with all sorts of people with whom we do not normally associate. Love of neighbour means respect for others, their relationships, their reputations, and their property. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 indicate love in action. Loving our neighbour as ourselves means looking at and treating others with the respect God gives them. This love begins at home with one's parents. It then extends to others. *Once two friends began to speak about their neighbours. One said my neighbours are really good and loving people. While the other said: I think my new neighbours are really poor... you should have heard the fuss they made when their 2 year old kid swallowed a 10 pence coin earlier*

Love of neighbour extends beyond our family and friends to strangers, especially to the poor, the sick, and the sinner. The ordinances from the Book of Exodus are explicit enough on how love is exercised in human relations. We shall not wrong a resident alien. We shall not abuse widows or orphans. If we do, God's wrath will be upon us. With Jesus, love is even more irksome. Not only does he identify love of neighbour with our love of ourselves and of God; he makes it quite clear that love is serving others, even laying down our lives for them. Love, when we do it, is the eternal in us, what lasts of us. It is God, again made flesh, in our reciprocation, our giving back. The love of God in whom we move and have our being is the same love made timely by our earthly care.