



THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 26th, 2014

Revised by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.

Father Ray was born in Waterloo and is #9 of a family of 9 boys and 3 girls. One brother (Harry) is a C.R. priest and two sisters are Notre Dame Sisters. He taught High School for 31 years and served in 4 parishes for 17 years. He is semi-retired and living in the priests' residence at St. Jerome's University, Louis Hall.

GATHERING TIME (10-15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

A test was done recently **feeding cheesecake to mice**. They loved it. Later the cheese cake was exchanged with good healthy rat food. The mice sniffed it, ignored it, and they starved to death (<http://tinyurl.com/m237jnu>).

The "**cheesecake**" is an image of our worldly pleasures, idols, and distractions: bodily appetites, possessions, technology, etc.. The average Canadian spends 8 hours a day on texting, cell phone, TV, computer, etc. Many of them do not have 3 free minutes a day, to pray, or an hour a week to worship God on Sundays, because they are too busy and focused on their "cheesecake," and have no desire for any spiritual values right now. Many of them are spiritually dead, like the dead mice.

So the point is to get them off "cheese cake," in order to choose the **Bread of Life**, the Risen Christ, as our Lord and Saviour.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is responding to a question posed by a lawyer who had asked which of the 613 laws of the Torah are most important. Jesus' words are familiar:

*"You shall **love the Lord** your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and with your entire mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall **love your neighbour** as yourself."*

Above we see that the world is often distracted by the "cheesecake," the many worldly idols; many people have lost focus that God is # 1, and that we should love our neighbour in need.

Jesus insists that "loving your neighbour" is in fact, *loving God*. In the grand scheme of things, there is no adequate image that will help us *see* or *experience* God other than by loving our neighbour. Think about this for a moment: *Your neighbour is your way to God*. This is the truth that we will pray on, and explore today as we gather again around God's Word with a few of *our neighbours* and in the presence of God's ever-empowering Spirit.

Warm-up Activity: (about 8-10 minutes):

- a. Share at your comfort level how you have moved from “cheesecake” to the “Bread of Life” in your spiritual journey.
- b. What word or phrase best describes “love,” as you understood it as a child? As you understand it today? Share your thoughts.

The Table of the Word

THEME

"And the second commandment is like the first"

Love, which is the foundation of the reign of God, is contagious. When we love others, the very act of loving spreads the reign of God throughout the community and the world. Paul reminds us of this today: **it is the goodness of their lives and their genuine care for each other** that made the Thessalonians renowned in the neighbouring territories. *“This is what being a Christian is all about”* is Paul's message. The **care and compassion** that we show for each other are two manifest signs at the very heart of the “Good News” proclamation. They proclaim “Good News”: that the reign of God is at hand, meaning that a loving God is in our midst. When we love like this, we truly love with the openness and generosity of God. (Dianne Bergant, 2001). In this regard St. Teresa of Avila, esteemed Spiritual Guide and Doctor of the Church, says it well:

“The farther you are advanced in this, the greater the love you will have for God: so dearly does our God love us, and God will reward our love for our neighbour by increasing the love we bear to Himself, and that is in thousands of ways; this I cannot doubt”. (Interior Castle)

Leader: With heart and mind and soul we must love the Lord.

Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, you make visible the Father's love for us, **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you show us how to love one another **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray

(together)

O good and compassionate God, in love you created all people and all things.

Now you send us to give living witness to this special love of yours,

especially to those whom society most neglects and ignores.

*Drive from our hearts the idols that this world worships— money and power, privilege and prestige—
so that we may be free to serve you alone, and, by loving our neighbour as ourselves,
to bring Your Light, justice and peace to the world. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving. Because it is a privileged time it is incumbent on us in the small group to proclaim God's Word with due reverence, to be attentive to this proclamation, and respectful of the communal interaction. The facilitator has arranged for group members to proclaim the three readings.

FIRST READING (Exodus 22: 21–27)

Thus says the Lord: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. “If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbour’s cloak in pawn, you shall restore it to that person before the sun goes down; for it may be their only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if that person cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING

(1 Thessalonians 1:5c–10)

Brothers and sisters: You know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 22:34–40)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.

“And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow several minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection
on a meaningful word or thought)*

COMMENTARY:

A favourite theme of these **Hebrew Bible readings** focuses on the **foreigner, the widow, the orphaned and the poor**. These are people at the margins of every society, people who are totally vulnerable. In ancient Israel God commissioned Moses to be especially attentive to these marginal people, as he led the Israelites who had been called to be a holy nation. This God, who is ever-compassionate, expects nothing less from his followers some three thousand years later. We witness these same situations today, with thousands of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Africa.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the **first reading** was chosen with the Gospel in mind, and spells out laws of the Torah that regulate behaviour toward widows, orphans, and poor persons who have been forced to deal with burdensome life situations. Here we see at close range the fundamental characteristics of the Law. There is nothing here about a God perceived as a *distant* lawgiver. Quite the opposite. From the beginning, Jesus and the Church have always taught that the observance of the law, especially in regard to the poor and the weak, must always be a priority. To mistreat or oppress such as these is to insult God, to render evil for good.

Paul's letter to his much-loved Christian community in Thessalonica is one of gratitude and praise for the rapid rate of growth among its members. He acknowledges the fact that, just as the community at Thessalonica has been a powerful faith witness to him, so they, in turn, have been a very effective witness to surrounding communities. They have contributed significantly to the rapid expansion of Jesus' gospel message and mission. Paul would be the first to explain that at the **core of these amazing conversions is their living witness to the two great commandments** we read about today, summarized in "love God...and love your neighbour as yourself." Note that Paul is *not* saying it doesn't matter whether you love God or not, just love your neighbour and you've got it made (Walter Burghardt, S.J., 1990). Had Paul lived to the end of the first century, he would surely have quoted John the Evangelist: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and whoever loves is born of God, and knows God." (1 Jn 4:7) Paul makes this the *primary thrust* of the Church, and for any who choose to call themselves "Christian".

We have heard the **Gospel** reading many times. The sacred writers advise us, however, to try to read it today with a new energy and with a new heart, being alert to new insights and possibilities. In the Gospel narrative a lawyer approaches Jesus to pose a question which was meant to challenge him. Jesus' answer goes beyond the limited legal outlook of the questioning lawyer and identifies *the love of God and neighbour* as the over-arching precept which embraces *all other laws* and against which all other laws must be measured. Jesus is telling us in effect that love of neighbour is inseparable from the love of God. This basic truth is confirmed beautifully by St. Augustine:

As for you, because you do not see God yet, you merit to see God by loving your neighbour. By loving your neighbour you purify your gaze for God. This is what St. John says very clearly, "For whoever does not love a brother or sister whom he has seen, cannot love a God who he has not seen." Therefore, love your neighbour; look within yourself whence this love of neighbour comes; there you will see God in the measure in which this will be possible for you."
(Homilies on the Gospel of John)

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to comment on the **Commentary**.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. (Exodus 22:22) "*You were once aliens yourselves.*"

The passage from Exodus comes from the law codes of ancient Israel. It reveals the human nature of the law, revealing God as personally watching over the observance of the law, and spelling out who we are to consider "our neighbour": aliens, widows, orphans and the poor.

- a) Talk with your group members of a time when **you personally felt marginalized** by others e.g. by reason of income, education, ethnic background, social status etc.
- b) Reflecting on your own observations and experience of people in your neighbourhood, in your parish community, in the workplace, people "in the media," who among these do you **feel are the most disadvantaged** and require help? Share your thoughts.
- c) **How responsive are** you to the apparent "vagrants" of the street who approach you directly seeking a handout for "a cup of coffee?" Do you automatically try to avoid them? Or do you make an attempt to respond to them? Share your thoughts.

2. *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord..."* (Thessalonians 1:5)

- a) Do you have a few special friends who continue to serve as a **reliable "faith witness"** for you?
- b) What qualities or behaviours of such people do you find especially affirming?
- a) If you were asked to identify what special **"faith-related gift" you most desire** at this time in your life how would you respond? The options below may help your decision. Comment on your choice.
 - a. A sense of God's abiding presence in your life.
 - b. A sense of gratitude—the realization that everything I have is gift.
 - c. A keen awareness of the implications of my being made in God's image and likeness.
 - d. A disposition of service—a willingness and readiness to be of willing service, using you "Time, Talent, Treasure" for the needy, the sick, the elderly, those most neglected.
 - e. A vocation to the priesthood, religious life, marriage or single state.

3. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:36).

There is hope for those who are distracted by the "cheesecake" (worldly idols) and ignore, or turn away, from this love. Look at **St. Augustine**, who finally accepted the faith after 30 years of prayer by his mother St. Monica.

Also **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, after a serious wound as a soldier in battle, spent months recuperating in a Catholic hospital. It was boring with no TV, iPad, etc., so he read the only thing available, the Bible and the Lives of the Saints. This changed his life. He would now start a new "Army for Christ," the Jesuits, who were the main missionaries accompanying the explorers to the new world, "America".

Discuss the **hope found** in the following texts:

- a. "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth **to people of good will**" (God's will).
- b. Jesus on the cross: "Father forgive them, for **they know not what they do.**"
- c. The Good Samaritan, the despised one, who **helped someone in need**, without judging.
- d. "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did that to Me."

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. Word for the Week:

**"People of a God who works wonders,
be His wonder today."
(Days of the Lord, p.232)**

2. Suggestion for the week:

Occasionally a song comes along with lyrics and melody that are truly inspiring, and in this case, accurately describe a spiritual truth in a very significant way. Such a song was written by a French poet Jacques Brel, and is entitled **"If We Only Have Love."** The lyrics can be heard as the clarion **call to create a new world** such as the world described in today's readings.

It is a world in which we warmly **embrace the young and the old**, rather than exploit them for our own purposes.

It is a world in which we **bequeath peace and prosperity** to the next generation, rather than war and the debt it incurs.

It is a world in which you recognize that **despite our own loneliness**, the power of God can work within us to create something marvelous.

We will not be limited by the confines of time or space; we will find our place in the vast scope of creation 'along with the sun and the stars.' By the grace of God, we can really accomplish great things *if only we have love*. You can access this song on your computer by way of You Tube. Simply get into GOOGLE, write, **You Tube, and "If We Only Have Love."** A number of versions of this song will pop up. The version Fr. Frank Ruetz liked best is sung by Johnny Mathis. Do yourself a favour and check out this song. It sums up beautifully the message of today's readings and is truly inspiring. This site will open other exciting sites for you.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: Having turned to serving the true and living God, let us pray in the name of Jesus.

That the Church may experience in its own communities the love of God and of neighbour that it preaches to others, we pray...

That children, the handicapped and all vulnerable members of our society may find compassion and cooperative care from all religions, we pray...

That families and individuals struggling to carry burdens of debt may find assistance and aid from those who mirror God's own compassion, we pray...

That our community may welcome newcomers from foreign lands, and cherish the heritage they bring to enrich our parish life, we pray...

That we may receive the Word with joy, and become an example to others, through our love of God and love of neighbour, we pray...

That those who strayed from the practice of the Faith, will turn from their focus on worldly idols ("cheesecake") and refocus on the love of God and neighbour, on their Spiritual journey, we pray...

That Jews, Muslims and Christians all over the world, who worship the same God and honour Abraham as their common Father, learn to live in peace and harmony and mutual respect, we pray...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together):

*To love you, O Lord our God, with all our heart and soul and mind,
we must love our neighbour as ourselves, and take as our neighbours,
those you most love: the helpless, the strangers, and the poor.*

*Establish deep in our hearts your compassionate justice, that the measure of our love
may be like yours for us, boundless and unconditional.*

*We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.*

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favors on us today,
we pray that all those under our influence, be moved to be open
to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one,
OUR FATHER...**

St. Augustine: "Lord, You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in you."

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., now deceased). For information or subscriptions: Toll Free: 1-877-242-7935. Email: theword@celebratingtheword.com website: www.celebratingtheword.com. The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).