

# Thirtieth Sunday of the Year – October 25, 2020

Exodus 22: 20-26 – Thesalonians 1: 5c-10 – Matthew 22: 34-20

An individual who is described as an “expert of the law” approached Jesus and wanted to know what was the most important law. Perhaps this was a trick question meant to trip up Jesus in his response. That reply was both direct and simple. In fact, what Jesus states is that all of the Revelation that is known can be boiled down to this: Love God, love neighbors as one loves oneself. This is a familiar saying. We know it well. But it is often requires a great effort to understand it and to live it out.

At various times and in various conversations, the question is brought up: what does love of self mean. It might seem strange to say “love of self,” almost prideful. But if it is given some thought, this is not the case at all.

Love of self does not mean being self-centered or narcissistic. It is not a selfish disregard for everyone else, that no one else counts but the self – me. A healthy love of self consists in being comfortable with who and what I am. It is a healthy acceptance of who and what I am as a creation of God. The lack of being comfortable with one’s self, a lack of self-respect, often leads to the effort to escape.. This can lead, for example, to a variety of addictions: alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, pornography, control. There are other ways that this discomfort with oneself can be evident: envy, jealousy, ridicule, judgement, bigotry, prejudice. All of

these suggest not being at ease with just what I am. It is in what I am that I can give honor and glory to God in my life.

If one can love one's self properly then the next step of loving one's neighbor can be taken. Such love is reflected in what we heard from the Book of Exodus. No one is a foreigner any more than any one of us. All of us were once foreigners, alienated from God. But we were treated with compassion by our loving God. All of us, in some time and in some way have experienced this compassionate and loving God through Jesus Christ, often shown to us through the actions of another person.

Properly understanding the love of oneself freely allows us to love our neighbor. Love of neighbor shows concern for those who are immediately around us. It also shows concern and respect for fellow human being as well as concern for our common planet. One cannot love a neighbor too much. Nor can a line be drawn that limits the concern and respect shown to any particular person.

A genuine love of God flows naturally from the first two. If there is healthy love of self, a love of the life that has been given by God, and if there is a love of the neighbor with whom we have been placed in this world by a loving God, then the genuine love of God will result. One cannot say that God is loved, if the self made by God is not loved. Nor can one say that God is loved, if one's neighbor, a fellow creation of God, is not loved as well.

The response Jesus made to the question which challenged him

was straightforward. It is the living out of the whole of that response, starting with ourselves, that proclaims the genuine faith and trust we have in a good and gracious God.