

Homily for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 14, 2019
By Deacon Nick Thompson

Have we all heard the expression, “We need to be ‘on the same page’ about this?” That's a way of saying "We are of one mind on this issue," or, "We are in total agreement concerning the topic." The origin of the idiom 'on the same page' is sometimes attributed to choral singing, when all singers needed to be on the same page and count in order to begin together. There are similar phrases used for a more general purpose: in the same league; in the same ballpark; preaching to the choir; all these to some degree mean the same thing – “We generally agree” or at least we’re discussing the same topic. Sometimes, when we parents speak to our “older children,” we wonder whether they are even on the same planet as we are. If we are “on the same page” however, we have in fact progressed from “general agreement” to “complete agreement.” Before he can answer the ‘scholar of the law’s’ question concerning ‘inheritance of eternal life,’ Jesus, in today’s gospel, must ascertain whether he and the scholar are ‘on the same page.’ Jesus asks, “What is written in the law?” “How do you read it?”

The scholar answers by combining the two greatest mandatory daily prayers of Jewish Law into one: The Shema of Deuteronomy 6:5-9 and, interestingly, the required Blessing after Sacrificial Meals in

Leviticus 19:18. Sacrificial meals are those which include sharing bread and wine. Coincidentally, the same Blessing we receive from the priest and deacon at the end of Mass. "May God bless you. Go out now to preach the good news of the Gospel to the people." The scholar brings together, unites into one: love of God and love of neighbor, that is love and thanksgiving for the providers of our daily bread. Just as the first three commandments at Sinai define our right relationship with God and the last seven commandments at Sinai define our right relationship with each other the Jewish scholar unites God's Law for mankind as set out in scripture. To this, Jesus responds, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

Now comes the time for the scholar to ascertain whether he and Jesus are still 'on the same page.' He asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Notice that in the parable of the Good Samaritan loving our neighbor would include caring for the absolute stranger, sharing with the poor and the alien; compassion and absolute honesty and justice in our relationships with others; total impartiality; a refusal to be a party to gossip or slander; an absence of malice toward anyone and a refusal to bear a grudge; taking care never to put another's life at risk and never taking private vengeance upon another; going the extra mile. Our Lord taught that we should do to others as we would have them do to us while placing no limitations on who the others are.

Are we even close to being 'on the same page' as Jesus when we consider 'Loving our neighbor as ourselves?' When Jesus says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," the word "as" is very radical: "Love your neighbor as yourself." That's a BIG word: "**As!**" It means: If you are energetic in pursuing your own happiness, you must be as energetic in pursuing the happiness of your neighbor. If we were a scale with "love of God" hanging off one arm and "love of neighbor" hanging off the other which would God expect to be heaviest? Jesus would expect our scale to be in balance. 1 John 4:20 points out, "Those who say, I love God, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this; those who love God must love their neighbor also."

Love of God and **love of neighbor** are connected. **We cannot love God** rightly if **we do not love our neighbors** and **we cannot love our neighbors** rightly if **we do not love God**. As **we** grow in **our** sanctification, our personal holiness, our journey toward sainthood, **we** must find ourselves **loving** both **God** and **neighbor** more and more. Not only that but our personal definition of neighbor must expand to meet God's creation both the visible and invisible, the neighbor both seen and unseen. If **we** lack **love**, biblically defined, for either **God** or **neighbor**, **we** are **not** living a life that pleases **our** Creator.

Love for one's **neighbor should never** be confused with indulgence. True love also corrects and maintains truth and justice. A father who gives his children anything they want spoils them. If **we love our neighbor** as our self, we must be as careful in setting standards and goals for them as we are for ourselves. It is a fact that anyone who does not have a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ will die in his sins and face eternity in hell. Therefore, we owe it to our neighbors to lovingly share with them the good news of the gospel through our teaching it and living it. True believers, that would be us, have been forgiven, possess eternal life, and have blessings forever as a direct result of others who have shared the gospel with them. God's love is evidenced in us by our communicating this precious gospel and loving others as we have been loved, by our passing on faithfully what we have received.

God has made provision for us to live an amazing life. He has unveiled truth regarding His accomplished work in Christ in His word, Sacred Scripture. It is our job to study, to search the scriptures and find out what these spiritual realities are. We certainly want to be "in agreement" with God when it comes to His will for our lives. God has made salvation available to every human being on the face of this earth. But of course, not all will accept it. This is why God wants each and every human being to have an accurate precise knowledge of the truth.

Scripture, God's revealed will, as Moses points out, was never meant to be ambiguous, to be too mysterious or remote, to be up in the sky or across the sea but rather "it should be something very near to us, already in our mouths and in our hearts." If we are to receive and hand on what God is offering in our time, we need to be on the same page as God. We get to his page through study of his word.

Paul provides us in 1st Corinthians 13:4-8 the precise definition, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. This kind of love should come to define for us the boundaries of ordinary love. It is eternal, divine, and will never cease. It has EVERYTHING to do with the importance of being on the same page with God. Whether it's parenting, tithing, getting out of debt, how and where we school our kids, where to go to church, how to handle our countries' borders or how we vote in an election, getting on the same page with God is critically important for our marriages, for our families, for our country, for our souls. Our prayer isn't that the Lord would show everyone that we are right, but that He would show us all what is right in His eyes and put us all on the same page: His page.