

## **Love Your Literal Neighbor**

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

October 31, 2021

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Whenever we hear a homily on love of neighbor, the preacher is often quick to point out that by ‘neighbor,’ we don’t just mean the people that live right next to us. The preacher specifies that ‘neighbor’ includes those on the other side of the world and people we haven’t even met. While this broadening of our definition of neighbor is a good and valid interpretation of scripture, perhaps there is a need to return to a literal understanding of neighbor today. In our divided world and diverse communities, do we love the people right next to us?

Loving one’s literal neighbor is a real test of faith, even more difficult than love of God. The significance of today’s Gospel passage of “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength [and] the second: you shall love your neighbor as yourself” is not just that these two are the greatest commandments, but also that these two commandments go together. According to Jesus, they must touch. As the scribe rightly noted in the Gospel, burnt offerings or sacrifices cannot be considered more important than love of neighbor or interfere in between love of God and love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is that important for Christians.

To love our neighbor in the literal sense, we have to first encounter them. This is especially urgent in our local community, where many of us worship together, but struggle to interact with each other. The speaker and evangelist Sarah Shin, in her book *Beyond*

*Colorblind*, suggests to her readers, “go out of your way to greet people who don’t look like you.” (105) This is a great first step in building cross-cultural trust, friendship, and ultimately love. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, also reflected on loving one’s neighbor in a literal way in the parish community. She wrote, “we cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know [Jesus] in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone any more...We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that loves comes with community.” (*The Reckless Way of Love*, 120) By getting to know each other and love each other, we will start to understand the love of God.

*The commandment to love ones’ neighbor needs to be taken literally.*

Do I love my actual neighbors? Have I said or did anything to intentionally hurt them or push them away? Have I reached out to my neighbors, especially if they are new to the neighborhood and of a different race or ethnicity than me?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that yes, we may still love our neighbors on the other side of the world and those we’ve never met. But, let us also start loving our literal neighbors and those that we can meet. Whenever we do that, as Jesus told the scribe in the Gospel, we are not far from the Kingdom of God.