

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* We just hear those words several times in today's readings. Love God - Love your neighbor. And love yourself. All three fit together

What does it mean to love God in this way? Surely it means that God should be our "center." Our life should revolve around him. He should be first in our thoughts, in our actions, and in our hearts. It means we must nurture our spiritual relationship with God through daily prayer, by learning all we can about him, by reading Scripture, and through participation in the sacraments.

Loving God in this way also means following another commandment: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Love of self is not vain or selfish, when directed toward the higher good of caring for and protecting this life, which God has given us, in service of him. We are made in the image of God. That alone makes us worthy of love. Self-love requires us to take care of our basic needs. We make sure we are fed, clothed, and sheltered. Then we reach beyond and indulge our wants as well. We spend time and energy doing things we enjoy, seeking joy, and surrounding ourselves with the people and activities that please us. All of this is good and beautiful when our lives themselves are ordered toward praise of God.

In the same way, we must love others. This is, after all, not merely a suggestion. It is a command. Loving our neighbor is not passive. It requires action. It calls us to reach out and provide for the needs of others; to share our time, our talents, and our resources with our neighbor; to invite them into God's embrace and give comfort and love freely to those who need it.

If we model our love after the Father's love, we must reach beyond our own circle. God's love is unconditional. He does not offer his love to only a few. He loves everyone, even those we might think are unlovable. His command to love our neighbor goes well beyond our circle of family and friends. It includes our enemies and those who are different from us; it includes those of all races, religions, and nationalities. No one is excluded from our responsibility to love them. No one.

Clearly, following this command is not always easy, but it is expected of us, nonetheless. Sometimes it requires forgiveness and putting aside judgment. Fortunately, when we ask, God will provide all the grace and strength we need to put his command in action. The formula is simple. Love means willing the good of the other. So, love God; Love yourself; love your neighbor.