

**October 25, 2020 | 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)**

[Ex 22:20-26](#)

[PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51](#)

[1 THES 1:5C-10](#)

[Mt 22:34-40](#)

*By John R. Donahue, SJ*

Among the many disruptions the pandemic has brought into our lives, is the absence of familiar ways of feeling God’s presence at Sunday liturgies through receiving the Eucharist in the presence of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We live with a “stripped down” faith reduced to essentials— best summarized in the response of Jesus in today’s Gospel. When tested, He named the greatest commandment, love God “with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” The “whole law and the prophets” depend on these. One cannot exist without the other.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks like a Jewish teacher and quotes Dt. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. Jesus is not unique in summarizing the law by two central commands. The great rabbi Hillel, when challenged to recite the whole Torah standing on one foot, replied “What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole law. The rest is commentary.” ([Babylonian Talmud](#)) and the first-century Jewish teacher Philo affirmed that love of God and neighbor fulfill the whole law. Loving the neighbor as one’s self does not mean that love of others cannot exist without healthy self-love, but that one must place one’s self in the situation of the neighbor, an echo of the Sermon on the Mount, “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12).

In the first reading from Exodus, love of neighbor unfolds in care for the most vulnerable in the land, the alien or immigrant, along with orphans, widows, and the “poor among my people”: four groups who appear throughout the “law and the prophets.” What they have in common is that they are the most powerless of neighbors. On this Sunday as an election nears, Catholics must go to the polls and ask how their choices manifest not only a belief and love of God, but awareness of a compassionate God who hears the cries of suffering neighbors and awaits action on their behalf. While exhortations to love the neighbor reappear frequently in the New Testament, surprisingly there are few commands to love God. As command, this seems puzzling and difficult. Love is spontaneous and free; how can it be commanded? God does not really need our service nor is God changed by our love as is a neighbor or loved one. God is also absolute mystery and it is difficult to really love what we do not know. Christians are much more at ease speaking of following God’s will, serving God, or praying to God in hope and faith.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola offer a profound reflection on the meaning of love of God. These exercises guide a person from confrontation with personal and social evil, though a call to follow the life and teaching of Christ, and conclude with a final [contemplation on the profound love of God](#). Two understandings of love inform the contemplation: the first is that love ought to be more in deeds than in words. The second is that love consists in interchanges between

the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what "he has or out of what he has or can; and so, on the contrary, the beloved to the lover."

The meditation unfolds in a review of the benefits received, "of Creation, Redemption and, pondering with much feeling how much God our Lord has done for me and that the same Lord desires to give me Himself as much as He can." The meditation then presents a panoply of God sustaining and "laboring in the heavens, elements, plants, fruit, cattle, etc." Finally descending from God like the rays of the sun are justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc."

During this pandemic, so many of the traditional graces of our faith seem distant. When we pray and wonder at, and with, the beauty of the earth, we can feel the presence of God the lover and can love in return. Prayer might well be accompanied by listening to the beautiful hymn "For the beauty of the Earth," by John Rutter, or praying the poem "Pied Beauty" of Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Glory be to God for dappled things..... He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him." With heart and soul and mind we can share our lives as a lover with the beloved.

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