

30th Sunday in Ord. Time
October 29, 2017
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There was an article written in *Time* magazine years ago, when an airplane suddenly crashed into the sea. The writer claimed that it was one of America's worst tragedies because of the large number of lives that were lost. It was also America's hour of heroism. The first heroes were the rescue workers who when asked one: "Why did you risk your life?" They said that it was their job. These rescue workers perhaps symbolize people who will do things if it is their job. "If it is not my job then I won't do it".

The second hero was one of the passengers, who was rescued and was in the lifeboats. He noticed a lady drowning, dived into the waters, and pulled her to the safety of the lifeboat. When asked later why he had risked his life he replied: "She called out to me and asked for help so I had to help." The hero could perhaps represent people who will do things if they are asked. "If you want my help, ask for it!"

The third hero was also one of the passengers of the ill-fated plane. After the tragedy struck, he found himself floating among the remains. Fortunately, one of the rescue helicopters noticed him and lowered a halter, which he grabbed and held on to. He could easily have saved himself but he saw a young lady drowning and he quickly put the halter around her and the helicopter was able to rescue her. Soon the helicopter came again and once again the man grabbed the lifeline. Instead of helping himself, he looked around and noticed another old lady struggling and got the halter around her and she was rescued.

Six times the man had a chance to save himself but six times he gave the lifeline to another. The seventh time when the helicopter came to the spot where the man had been floating, he was gone! History will never know who exactly this heroic passenger was, but he symbolized what Christ meant when he said: "Greater love than this no man has, than that he lays down his life for a friend!"

The Pharisees who questioned Jesus in today's Gospel reading were trying to get a simple answer to the question that the scholars of Hebrew law debated: "What is the greatest of the commandments?" There were 613 of them in Hebrew Scripture. Which was the most important? Jesus responded to the lawyer's question with two quotations from the Torah. The first quotation came from the Sacred Jewish Prayer called the *Shema Israel*. This was a prayer contained in the sixth chapter of the *Book of Deuteronomy* 6:5 and recited by pious Jews every morning and evening, "*Hear this, O Israel, God is One. You shall love your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind.*" The second quotation came from the Book of Leviticus, 19:18, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

This was not the easy answer the lawyer was seeking. Jesus' answer was not a particular law, not even two particular laws. His answer demanded a new lifestyle, a way of living that draws us so close to God that we become His presence for others. We can't just love God part time, we have

to love Him with everything we have. We can't just be good to our neighbor sometimes, we have to be good to others always. Christianity is an ongoing process of becoming. Everyday we take steps to becoming a Christian.

Once St. Augustine said to his students: "if you are ever confused with any teachings of the Scripture, use this principle as an interpretive guide. All the bible meant to bring us to the point where we love God; and because we love God, we love our neighbor. Everything else is commentary."

We all know about Dorothy Day, a saintly American woman whom God used to touch others. She lived from 1893 to 1980 and is sometimes called the saint of the third millennium. Dorothy did not begin her adult life as a holy person. She embraced the loose lifestyle in Greenwich Village in New York City. She was no Mother Theresa. In fact, she was the antithesis of Mother Theresa. But then Dorothy found God. Actually, God was always there. She just stopped shutting him out of her life. She became a fervent Catholic, a dedicated Christian. She led a reform within the Church of America to reach out to the poor, the needy and the desperate. She was a crusader for social justice, a pacifist and even an agitator, at least in those areas where she saw the local and national government existing only for itself.

There is talk Dorothy Day should be canonized, made a saint. She would have been completely repulsed by that thought. In fact, even during her life when people suggested that she would be made a saint by the church, she would say that she didn't want to be dismissed so easily. After all, people tend to view saints as someone who does things which is beyond normal human life. She was really quite normal. She wanted normal people to join her in finding Christ in others. Her point was that there was nothing extraordinary in doing what she did. All she did was love God and love neighbor, and live the way every Christian should live.

Which commandment is the greatest? It is love for God and love for neighbor. But this is a lifestyle, not a commandment. We pray today that we might love God so deeply that we will have no choice but to bring God's love to those around us.

St. Paul Says: *"If I speak in human and angelic tongues* but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing".*

The special focus of the Gospel is that, if I do not love the neighbor whom I can see how can I say I love God? Love is seen in our attitude and actions towards our neighbor. The challenge is to love others just as much as we love ourselves. When there are decisions to be made is our main consideration: "What's in it for me?" or "How will my decision/action or inaction affect others?"

Genuine human concern that touches lives is an effective sacrament of the transcendent love of God. The love of God is actually enfleshed in the nitty-gritty of human interpersonal relationships. The authenticity of our religion is guaranteed by the value of our love for real people. One could use the image of the flower that is rooted in the soil; it grows slowly by transforming the elements of the soil in to its own living cells and eventually reaches up to the beauty of the sky with its own form, colour and scent. The one sap enlivens the root, the stalk, the flower and produces the perfume.

A truly Christian life is rooted in the earth and yet reaches up to the mystery of God through living in love. We are asked not just to believe that there is a God, but to love God. We are asked not just to respect our neighbor, but to love our neighbor. Love is not only the truth about human beings but also the truth about God, who is love itself.