

## **'Loving God and Neighbor' – (God-me-my neighbor)**

There is a natural, logical kind of loving that loves lovely things and lovely people. That's logical. But there is another kind of loving that doesn't look for value in what it loves, but that *creates value* in what it loves. Like Rosemary's rag doll.

When Rosemary was three years old, she was given a beautiful little rag doll, which quickly became an inseparable companion. She had other toys that were intrinsically far more expensive, but none that she loved like she loved the rag doll. Soon the rag doll became more and more rag and less and less doll. It also became more and more dirty. If you tried to clean the rag doll, it would become more ragged still. And if you didn't try to clean the rag doll, it became dirtier still. The sensible thing to do was to trash the rag doll. But that was unthinkable for anyone *who loved Rosemary. If you loved Rosemary, you loved the rag doll too – it was part of the package.*

*Loving God means loving others too!* We cannot separate love of God and love of neighbor. They are the two sides of the same coin. A religious said, "My love for God brings me to love the people He loves!" A social reformer said, "My love for the people brings me to love God whom they love!" Whichever way will do! That's why, St. John aptly stated, "For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen" (1 John 4:20).

The Cross is a complete illustration of love of God and neighbor. The vertical line of the cross illustrates our love for God and the horizontal line of the cross illustrates our relationship with our neighbors. If the two lines are not crossed, they are not a cross.

There is an immortal poem written by Englishman Leigh Hunt about a man called Abou Ben. He woke from his sleep one night and saw in his room an angel writing in a book of gold, the names of those who love God. "And is mine one?" inquired Abou. "Nay, not so," replied the angel. "I pray thee, then," said Abou, "write me as one who loves his fellow men." The following night the angel came again and displayed the names of those who love God and Abou Ben's name topped the list.

One cannot exist apart from the other. WE are created to co-exist and pro-exist. That is what we find in today's gospel. Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment in the law. The book answer, of course is love of God. But Jesus does not stop there. He goes on to give a more practical answer. He gives the other side of the coin as well, which is love of neighbor. True love of God and true love of neighbor are practically two sides of the one and the same coin.

Jesus makes it clear that all of the divine law is summed up in a love, which embraces the totality of our relationship with God, self & neighbor. Knowing ourselves, being loved by God-even before we love him-, propels us to love our neighbor. Because, serving our neighbor draws us more fully into the heart of God. And, returning to the source of all love, will help us to discern how we can be in solidarity with our neighbors in new ways.

Once an English journalist visited Kolkata, India to see the works of the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa. He went to their house of the destitute at Kali-ghat and watched an attractive young Nun dressing the wounds on a man with big dirty wound in his leg. The journalist was appalled by the very sight of the wound, but at the same time he was full of admiration for the young nun who seemed to show no disgust as she was cleaning the dirty, smelly wound. **"I wouldn't do that for \$1,000,"** said the journalist. **"Neither would I,"** said the Nun, **"I do it for love of Jesus"**.

Listen Christians, brothers and sisters: the Lord your God his One; therefore, love *Him*; with your whole desire, with your whole soul, love him with all that you have. Let the Shema' surround you, and the God you love bless you today, and every day! Amen. (Fr. James)