

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday (A)

- There are 2 traditions about love in the O.T. – love of God & love of neighbour. But Jesus is the first to bring them together as one being the condition of the other.
- And *neighbour* is no longer the one next to me, or the one who is the same race or religion or same interest group as me, but the ones who are different from me.
- That was the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan – the one not only who is different, but despised, who shows what it means to be a neighbour.
- In today's global community where the economic, political & communications links bring the world's nations more closely together & what happens to one nation affects others, this Gospel is pertinent.
- And with regard to the various races & creeds in Australia, the Gospel is a real challenge.
- But there's a 3<sup>rd</sup> element in the Gospel that can be easily forgotten -*love of self*.
- You cannot love God or others if you have not love for yourself.
- Love, in these terms is not about self-seeking & self-centredness, but about self-gift & unless we have a sense of self-worth, we do not have a self to give.
- In today's Gospel, Jesus focuses attention, in the most simple terms, on the very essence of what it means to be a human being: to be a woman or a man is to live a life of love. Whatever we might achieve in our life, if we fail in this, the value of our life is severely diminished; whatever our failures, if we learn something about how to receive & to give love, our life has certainly not been in vain.
- Jesus said, 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.'
- Only when we accept ourselves as fundamentally good, & begin to love ourselves, will we be able to start loving other people as the Lord commanded.
- Those who are filled with self-loathing & self-hatred are not going to be able to love others. They will project these feelings onto others.
- They will blame, criticise & want to punish others for what they don't like in themselves.
- There is the story of an old man sitting on a bench at the edge of town when a stranger approached. *'What are the people in this town like?'* the stranger asked. *'What were they like in your last town?'* replied the old man. *'They were kind, generous, & would do anything for you for you if you were in trouble.'* He replied: *'Well, I think you will find them much the same in this town.'*
- Some time later a second stranger approached the old man & asked the same question: *'What are the people in this town like?'* And the old man replied: *'What were they like in the town you have come from?'* *'It was a terrible place,'* came the answer. *'I was glad to get out of it. The people there were mean, unkind, & nobody would lift a finger to help you if you were in trouble.'* 'I'm afraid,' said the old man, *'you'll find them much the same in this town.'*
- The main point of this story is: We see other people not as they are but as we are.

- If we see people in a bad light, it is a sign that we are ill at ease with ourselves.
- Those who are not at peace with themselves spread a contagion of conflict around them - unless we love ourselves we cannot love others properly.
- Few love themselves in such a way as to be able to love others properly – we've been taught.
- There is an idea that love of self is wrong, even sinful.
- There is, of course, a form of self-love which is wrong - we call it selfishness or egoism, but there is a form of self-love which is healthy & good, & without which we cannot really love others.
- We can only love with the amount of love that is in us.
- Whether we are conscious of it or not, we do love others precisely as we love ourselves - It's important, then, to have a healthy love & respect for ourselves.
- This is where love starts, but of course it is not meant to end there.
- All true love of self overflows in the form of love of others & of God.
- It's easy to love certain people because they are loveable, but not so easy to love others who are clearly & obviously flawed.
- But that is the real test of love; it's also the real test of our love for God.
- The persecution of Jesus & his followers was championed by well-meaning religious people motivated by what they believed to be zeal & love for God.
- The same people asking about the first commandment are the ones trying to entrap & kill Jesus. They are so conscious about love of God.
- Why then are they so insensitive when it comes to love of neighbour?
- Saul, who later became St Paul is a good example of this kind of skewed religiosity.
- Jesus prophesied that *"an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God"* (John 16:2).
- The error of the Pharisees is still here with us.
- There are still many Christians who try to separate love of fellow human beings from love of God; their commitment to faith does not include commitment to human rights & to justice & peace issues.
- True love of God & true love of neighbour are two sides of the same coin.
- Any attempt to separate them is a falsification of the message of Christ.
- John in his first letter states clearly: *"Those who say, 'I love God,' & hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen"* (1 John 4:20).
- So is love the basis of **your** life? Who do **you** love? Is God for you someone you just **know** about...or can you say you **love** God, love Jesus? What is your love for your family like, for your husband or wife, for your parents, for your friends? How do you express that love?
- Love, the foundation of the reign of God, is contagious.
- When we love others, the reign of God spreads throughout the world.
- The compassion that we show toward others is a form of evangelisation.
- It proclaims much louder than any words that the reign of God has been established within us & among us.