

Loving as Christ Loves

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) – Mt 22:34-40
Ave Maria Catholic Church. October 29, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

Today's gospel message directs our attention to our greatest call to love God unconditionally and to love our neighbor with a love of friendship. This is our highest call. This is our highest vocation.

Jesus not only wants to reaffirm the importance of the law, but He also wants us to embrace our vocation to love. He is the message of love from the Father, (John 3:16). He teaches us that God the Father so loves us that He sent Him, our Lord and Savior, to find again God's love and friendship.

Do we want to know what love means? Let us look at Jesus. Do we want to understand what loving God with the whole heart is? Let us look at Jesus. Do we want to discover what loving our neighbor is? Let us look at Jesus.

Then, when we raise our eyes and look at Jesus, we will also hear Jesus's words: "*As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you . . . You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (John 15: 9-14).

Now, Jesus does not only explain what love means with his words, but his very life becomes an eternal lesson on love. Do we want to know what love means? Let us look at Jesus crucified. The love of Jesus crucified is not an abstract thought. The love of Jesus crucified is not a theory. The love of Jesus crucified is real, concrete, and tangible. We know that there is no greater love than this, to die for someone else. And here is Jesus, loving us to the end. Then, from the cross, Jesus draws our friendship.

Today, as we meditate on the highest call to love, let us reflect on the memorial of Jesus's ultimate act of love, which is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Holy Mass is, above all, "a sacrifice." It is the sacrifice of Redemption and the sacrifice of the New Covenant. Holy Mass is the unique and perfect sacrifice offered by the Son of God, who was made flesh and went to his passion and death for our salvation. Now as then, this Sacrifice is offered by the Eternal High Priest, Jesus. He is the principal priest. The celebrant priest, the ordained minister, offers this Sacrifice in the person of Christ (*in persona Christi*).

Holy Mass is the highest act of love and worship to God that we can offer. Unfortunately, sometimes, we do not perceive the true value of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. What do we look for when we come to the Sunday Mass? Perhaps we look for a good homily.

However, the homily is not the center of the Mass, and it should not be the focus of our attention. Perhaps we look for beautiful hymns, but as beautiful as they might be, they are not the center of the Mass, and they should not be the focus of our attention either.

The Venerable Fulton Sheen says: *“In the Catholic Church the <altar>, and not the pulpit or the choir or the organ, is the center of worship, for there is re-enacted the memorial of His Passion.”* That is the center of the Mass, and that should be the focus of our attention: the altar and the Holy Sacrifice of Jesus for us on the altar. Here, on the altar, is re-enacted the memorial of Jesus' passion, the ultimate act of love of our Redeemer.

The value of the Mass does not depend on Fr. Michael or Fr. Peter. Any priest will always be an unworthy minister who holds a treasure with hands of clay. It does not depend on the faithful either. There could be five thousand people or five people participating in the Mass, and the Mass will continue having the same value, that is infinite, as infinite as the love of Jesus. The value of the Mass depends on Him, the One High Priest and Victim, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We come to Mass to be witnesses and participants of the love of Christ. We come to Mass to be present at the renewal or re-enactment of the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for our salvation. At the Last Supper, the apostles were witnesses of the anticipation of the sacrifice of the Cross. Now, we are witnesses of the memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross.

The Holy Mass is the same sacrifice that Our Lord offered on Mount Calvary. Only the manner of the offering is different. On the cross, Jesus died by the shedding of his blood. On the altar, Jesus renews His death in a sacramental or mysterious manner. This happens at the consecration.

There is a separate and distinct consecration of the two species. First, the bread is taken, and after the words of consecration, the bread is transformed into Jesus's body. Then, the chalice is taken, and after the consecration, the wine is transformed into Jesus' blood. That double, distinct, and separate consecration signifies sacramentally the death of our Lord Jesus. Then, the union of a particle of the consecrated host with the precious blood in the chalice before communion represents sacramentally Jesus' resurrection.

The excellence of the Holy Mass also resides in the fact that this 'Sacrifice of Christ' is offered to God for four great ends that correspond to the four great duties we owe to God:

First, to adore the infinite majesty of God, who deserves all glory and honor.

Second, to satisfy the infinite justice of God, offended by the sins committed against Him.

Third, to thank the endless mercy of God for all the favors bestowed upon us.

And fourth, to petition the infinite goodness of God for the blessings that we need.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the Memorial and re-enactment of the Sacrifice of the Cross in a sacramental manner. It is the perfect act of adoration, satisfaction, thanksgiving, and petition that Jesus Himself, the Eternal High Priest, offers on our behalf.

This memorial is not a mere recollection of past events. Here, in the celebration of Holy Mass, the Passover of Christ is made present. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council affirms: *“As often as the Sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed’ is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out,”* (*Lumen Gentium*, 3).

Here at Mass, Jesus teaches us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and our neighbor as He did. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a school of love, and we come at the foot of the altar to learn from Jesus. During this Holy Mass, let us implore Jesus that we may learn from Him and be participants in his love. Amen.