

**Readings for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
Ave Maria Catholic Church – Extraordinary Form

**Ephesians 4: 1-6**

Brethren, I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**Matthew 22: 34-46**

At that time, the Pharisees came to Jesus, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus questioned them, saying, “What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They replied, “David’s.” He said to them, “How, then, does David, inspired by the Spirit, call him ‘lord,’ saying: ‘The Lord said to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies under your feet”’? If David calls him ‘lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

## Love is a Journey

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Mt 22: 34-46

Ave Maria Catholic Church, September 24, 2023 – Fr. David M. Vidal

Love is a journey. That is how Pope Benedict XVI defines love. He says: “*Love is indeed ‘ecstasy,’ not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving,*” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 6).

The Greek word *ekstasis* means to stand outside of or transcend oneself. And that is love, a force that moves us outside of ourselves and leads us to happiness and fulfillment. Love is not something static and petrified. To love means traveling, rushing with one’s heart towards the object loved.

The author of *The Imitation of Christ* confirms this definition when he says: “*He who loves: currit, volat, laetatur, runs, flies, and rejoices,*” (Book III, c. V, n. 4).

Love, therefore, is the journey of the heart. Our journey started the day we were created. God created us human beings with a spiritual soul capable of knowing and loving. This is how we are able to know Him and love Him.

That is our journey. Our minds search for our Creator. We find this universe filled with goodness and beauty, and immediately, our minds look at them with fascination. Then, we start running. Our hearts are drawn to that goodness and beauty. We find some goodness, and we think, that is it, that is the joy of my life! However, our hearts remain restless, and we keep moving and searching. We are not satisfied with this minute, limited goodness and beauty!

In his book of *Confessions*, Chapter X, Saint Augustine regrets that it took him more than thirty years to discover the beauty of the divine. After trampling with false knowledge, false pleasures, and false loves, he writes:

*“Late have I loved you, O Beauty, ever ancient and ever new. Late have I loved you! In my weakness, I ran after the beauty of the things you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The things you have made kept me from you – the things which would have no being unless they existed in you! You have called, you have cried, and you have pierced my deafness. You have radiated forth, you have shined out brightly, and you have dispelled my blindness. You have sent forth your fragrance, and I have breathed it in, and I long for you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst for you. You have touched me, and I ardently desire your peace.”*

Saint Augustine's journey is also our journey. It is the journey of our hearts towards God. It is what Saint Augustine declares at the beginning of his book of *Confessions*: "*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.*"

Loving God is, therefore, the journey of the heart towards Him. However, love for God is a mysterious journey. We cannot start unless God takes the initiative. In the gospel of Saint John, we read that Jesus says: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,*" (John 6:44).

God draws us! He does not use force or coercion. He does not impose his love. Loving Him must be our free answer and, at the same time, God's grace. Again, St Augustine teaches in one of his homilies: "*God draws you not only in a way that you yourself want but even in such a way that you enjoy being drawn,*" (Augustinus, In Io. Evang. Tr. 26, 4).

We love being drawn by God, and as we move, we discover Him and the true meaning of our existence. We discover that we were created to love God "*with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind,*" (Mt 22: 37).

Now, in this life, we cannot see God as He is. How can we love God without seeing Him?

It is true that in this life, no one has ever seen God as He is. However, God is not totally invisible to us. We see Him through the works of creation and his providential care for us. God does not remain completely inaccessible. Even more, God has made himself visible in Jesus. In the Son of God, who was made flesh, we can also see the Father, (Jn 14:9).

Pope Benedict XVI presents Jesus as the incarnate love of God, the Good Shepherd, who seeks his lost sheep with compassion (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12). Jesus is the love-story of the Father who "*so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life,*" (John 3: 16).

This love-story is recorded in the Gospels. Jesus came to win our hearts. We discover it in his miracles, preaching, and merciful actions. Particularly, we see it in his passion, from the Last Supper to the piercing of his heart on the Cross and the foundation of the Church.

Jesus then leaves us a memorial of his love in the Eucharist. Here, in the Eucharist, Jesus invites us to love as He loves. He wants to be our companion on our journey, and He wants to lead us to that happiness and fulfillment for which we are searching.

Now we understand the words of Saint Paul: "*Caritas Christi urget nos*" (2 Cor. 5:14). The love of Christ impels us. Then, at the end of Mass, the priest says: "*Ite Missa Est.*" Go forth, the Mass is ended. As followers of Christ, we are not scattered but sent to continue our journey and love as Christ loves.

We are sent to evangelize and communicate with words and actions that we are pilgrims on earth and that we want to work for a place in our true homeland, heaven.

Our love is much more than a feeling. Our love is much more than words. Our love is seen in concrete actions. By feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, ransoming the captive, and burying the dead, we show the love of Jesus.

By instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses willingly, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and the dead, we declare that we are pilgrims who look for the ultimate union of love with God.

Love is a journey. We are called to love not little but much. We must not stop at the point at which we have arrived, but we must go forth and continue our journey until we reach the perfect maturity in Christ Jesus.