

November 5, 2006
31st Sunday of the Year (B)

By Father Charles Bowes

Deuteronomy 6:2-6
Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 12:28-34

Relationships become more important than deeds and actions – such is the consequence of Jesus' command to love God and neighbor.

Love God and neighbor, right? That's everything, right? Do it and everything is OK, right? We've fulfilled all that God asks, right?

We begin to unlock the depth of Jesus' words when we ponder what it means to love God. If asked, most of us in this church today would readily answer that we love God. If pressed, however, I must admit that I'm more inclined to say I love people more than God – after all, I can see and touch people. But then, that's what it means to love God, isn't it – to love people? So we do love God. After all, participating in a regular celebration of the sacraments, finding time for prayer, trying to do the best we can, caring for others, and professing belief in the truths of our faith are most assuredly signs that we love God. Aren't they?

The answer, unfortunately, is no. Simply because we do the "right" things does not necessarily mean that we love God and neighbor. An individual can be motivated to do the "right" things for many reasons other than love. We may be motivated by fear, self-interest and protection, a need to please someone else or to do what is right and good, or simply a feeling about what we are supposed to do. None of these motivations

speaks of love, and none require an intimate, personal relationship with the God of our creation.

Love of God and neighbor is something that goes far deeper and becomes a matter of the heart. It is easy to look at the list of what is expected of a good, religious person and complete the tasks. However, focusing our lives around that principle serves only to leave us empty and basking in superficiality. There is no depth, conversion or change. Jesus saw the religious people of his day falling into this very trap, and we continue to do the same. In establishing these two great commandments, Jesus wants to push us to the limits and immerse us into a spirituality that places relationship first and proper deeds and actions second.

I recall a time in my life when I grew distant from my aging mother. We had little in common. My work was consuming me. And her diminishment in mind and body made an easy excuse for me to allow others to care for her. Notes and phone calls became perfunctory – and then one day she said, "I really do wish we were closer."

Think of a significant relationship in your life: a parent, a sibling, a spouse or significant other. Is it simply enough to do or say the right things in order for that relationship to deepen, grow and prosper? Great,

intimate human relationships are born when we move beyond simply doing and saying the right things to truly investing ourselves in the heart of another. We come to this point when we find ourselves concerned more with the needs, desires and heart of another person than with our own. And that is so hard to do...especially when distances have separated us. And yet that is love of God and neighbor. We need God's help to do it and God's forgiveness when we cannot. We're all neophytes at love – learners in the school of care and concern for God and of one another. That's what brings us here to this table and gathering, and we give praise for that.

Let us pray...Heart. Soul. Mind. Strength. Draw us entirely into deeper love for you and for one another, oh God. Fix us firmly in love for you and for everyone... through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Relationships become more
important than deeds and
actions – such is the consequence
of Jesus' command to love
God and neighbor.