

## Sacred Heart Novena - 31 May to 8 June 2018

### HE LOVED WITH A HUMAN HEART

**Day 8: Thursday, 7 June – 9<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time – Greatest Commandment: Love**  
Reading: 2 Tim 2:8-15; Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25; Gospel: Mark 12: 28-34

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to the scribe who was talking to him "you are not far from the kingdom of God." As I stand before you on this 8<sup>th</sup> day of our Novena, I hear that sentence addressed to us as well - "tomorrow is the Feast already...you are not far from the kingdom of God!"

The scribe must have felt really affirmed when Jesus said that to him. He asked a question that every Jew can answer - *Which is the first of all the commandments?* And Jesus gives the expected answer "*This is the first: Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" This should have been the end. This is the answer the scribe was expecting. But no, Jesus was not finished yet. Before anyone can react he adds "*The second is this, 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.'*" *There is no commandment greater than these.*" So for Jesus, the greatest commandment is not just one, they are two – Love God with all of yourself and Love your neighbor as yourself. In the previous days, we have, in fact, been reflecting on these themes. Last Tuesday, we spoke about giving to God all that we are and all that we have, giving back to God what belongs to God. Yesterday, we learned from Pope Francis five practical expressions of love of God and love of neighbor – Perseverance, patience and meekness; joy and sense of humor; boldness and passion; in community; and in constant prayer. Today, I would like to reflect on the love that is presumed in the commandment to love God and neighbor – the love of self.

In the command to love God, it is presumed that there is a "self" capable of loving and offering itself. In the command to love our neighbor, it is presumed that the person loves her/himself and it is her/his love for her/himself that becomes the measure for loving the neighbor. It is true that we are not commanded to love ourselves, rather it is presumed that we already love ourselves. The question is - do we love ourselves and do we love ourselves rightly?

While preparing this homily, I came across an article by a Jewish Rabbi, his name is Rabbi Alan Lurie and he and he talks about true and false love of self (see [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-alan-lurie/what-is-selflove\\_b\\_1196519.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-alan-lurie/what-is-selflove_b_1196519.html)). The Rabbi says false self-love is simply "*The desperate need to be seen as special in order to feel safe.*" We see this in many concrete ways. For example, **too much** attention given to how one looks, what one wears, how one is treated, etc. In an online conversation that Pope Francis had with Japanese students from the Sofia University in Tokyo in December 2017, one of the students asked the Pope, what is your image of yourself? The first part of the Pope's answer concertizes for me what Rabbi Lurie calls "false self-love." The Pope said "*When we comb our hair and wash our face, we look into the mirror. We have an image of ourselves. But when the mirror starts to be part of your life, you begin to dialogue with the mirror in an attitude that is almost—or completely—narcissistic and you end up with a pathology of self-referentiality.*" The desperate need to be seen as special, what the Pope calls being self-referential – when we think the universe revolves around ourselves, when everything is about me - this is false self-love.

True love, on the other hand, according to Rabbi Lurie, is *“the commitment to know, experience and contribute as deeply as possible to the growth of someone or something.”* In the case of self-love, it is to contribute to your own growth. Take note of the words used, true love is not an emotion or an attraction. It is a commitment and, the Rabbi continues, it always arises from gratitude and the determination to give. Let us now listen to the last part of the Pope’s answer to the Japanese student. He said *“I try to look inside myself once or twice a day. To look at the things I felt during the day, the things that happened inside me. And then based on that, I judge myself; that is to say, I decide what opinion I deserve of myself for that thing I did, for that decision I made, for that attitude I had.”* In answer to the student’s question, Pope Francis said *“the image I have of myself is that of a sinner whom God loves, and has loved greatly.”* True self love is the commitment to know, experience and contribute as deeply as possible to one’s growth, and Pope Francis shows us how he does it. Once or twice daily, he looks at himself with the loving eyes of Jesus. Some of us may know and practice this “exercise” that the Pope does, it is called *“awareness examen.”* Let’s try it if we have not yet done so. I believe it is an act of true self-love and an act that will help us grow in our love for God and for others.

His image of himself as a sinner whom God loves is an image that also applies to each of us – sinners, loved and forgiven, this is who we are. I am a sinner loved and forgiven – remembered by God only in the light of his love!

So, although self-love is not commanded, is it important? Yes. In fact, true self-love is necessary. Why? Again, I am quoting Rabbi Lurie - *“The simple truth is that we treat others in the same way that we treat ourselves, because we can only give what we have...When I know that love is the very mechanism of growth, I will forgive myself for my mistakes as one accepts a child’s fall as she is learning to walk, with the commitment to learn and develop; I will see myself as I am without the need to condemn or praise; I will view my life as a great gift and adventure for which I am grateful; and I will embrace my emotions in all their variety as a part of what it means to be alive. Then I will naturally treat others in this lovely way — with compassion, openness and kindness, and with the commitment to be an agent of their growth.”*

I pray for each of us to grow in true love - that we may progress, daily, in the loving way of treating others and ourselves – with compassion, openness and kindness, and with the commitment to be an agent of growth.

Today, in this Eucharistic celebration, we are given a chance to treat ourselves kindly and lovingly. We are invited to come to be prayed over, to allow ourselves to be touched, anointed and healed by Christ through his ministers. Brothers and sisters, let us treat ourselves with compassion, openness and kindness. Come and be loved! Come and be healed!