

30th Sunday – A – 2017
October 29, 2017
Holy Spirit (HG)

Ex. 22:20-26
I Thess. 1:5c-10
Matt 22:34-40

- I. Take a moment and look around at everyone else in church – in the same pew there may be someone you know: your spouse, your children.

As you look around the church, you may see good friends from years' past, well known acquaintances, people you know by name. And, there may likely be people you've seen here in church before, but don't know their name. And there may be complete strangers.

When Jesus taught us to "Love your neighbor as yourself," he meant love everyone you see here. I don't think it was just a nice saying...a good idea. I think he really meant it: love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself. He may well have added: don't distinguish among people: love your neighbor as yourself.

- II. I hear echoes of this in much of our national conversation on various issues. As you know, we've had lots of demonstrations, violence, much discussion about racism. We've wrangled over immigration for years; the recent DACA decision has deepened this conversation and we've become polarized on this issue. In the past couple of weeks, we've heard many accusations against men who have disrespected women. Many women across the country are speaking up, naming individuals, bringing to the public discussion of how they've been disrespected.

As I've listened to each of these discussions unfold, I have heard with frequency, the simple statement, "Well, we're all people." I've heard people say, "We just need to treat each other as people.

Regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic group, financial status or whatever difference you want to identify - it all comes down to one main thing: we're all people.

And I'm thinking this is so basic, so fundamental: we are all people. In Christian language we would say we're all children of God; we're all created by one God; we're brothers and sisters to one another.

And therefore we should treat each other as members of the same family.

III. We just heard Jesus identify the two greatest commandments: love God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your mind AND love your neighbor as yourself. These two commandments are connected: these cannot, and should not, be separated.

We might think it is easy to love God. All we have to do is have good feelings about God, go to church, say my prayers. But we are loving God when we love our neighbor.

And loving our neighbor can be hard, because there are a lot of people who just don't seem all that lovable!

But, on the first level, love of neighbor calls for just basic human respect – something we express in the Golden Rule: treat others the way you would want to be treated. If we remember that...if we ask ourselves how do I want to be treated... that will go a long way in teaching us how to treat other people. Would I want to be treated that way? If not, then why would I want to do that?

Getting to know people, getting comfortable around people, learning about them will also help us to “love” our neighbor. Knowledge helps to break down barriers. You may have noticed in the bulletin that the Social Justice Committee is working on a “Dialogues” program through which we hope to build these comfort levels. The vision is to facilitate small group discussions in which people of various backgrounds can just simply visit and get to know one another. This is one way in which we can concretely live out this commandment. Watch the bulletin for further details.

IV. Once again, these aren't just nice words – something pious to say: they're the greatest commandments – love God, love neighbor. Jesus meant what he said. This is essential and basic.

We see how serious this is when we look at the first reading:

- you shall not molest or oppress an alien – for you were once aliens yourselves
- you shall not wrong any widow or orphan...if ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry...my wrath will flare up and I will kill you with the sword!
- if you lend money to one of your poor neighbors you shall act like an extortioner by demanding interest

- if you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge you shall return it by sunset...for what else does he have to sleep in?...if he cries out to me, I will hear him.

Loving our neighbor – showing basic respect simply because they are a human being is not a commandment we can excuse ourselves from. It is really meant to be lived.

V. So, look around at the people here in church – how can you love them! How can we love each other?! And don't forget people on the street, strangers in the store. We are challenged to do this in very practical ways.

Treat others the way you want to be treated. Think of God has, and does treat us: we are to do the same for each other.

Fr. Dwayne Thoman