

*31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 04, 2018*

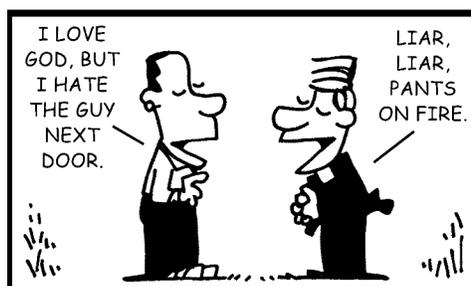
"You are not far from the kingdom of God." What does it mean to be close to God's kingdom? In today's Gospel, Jesus is in a dialogue with teachers of the law. They know well the Law of Moses, with its complex codes, expectations, and punishments. What will Jesus say?

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus effortlessly distills all the books of law into two commands. The simplicity of the Gospel message doesn't mean it's easy to follow. Far from it! The simplicity of the Gospel indicates its totality. Anything that requires the passions of our heart, the choice of our soul, the reason in our mind, or the strength of our body -- all of this ought to be animated by love. As you can imagine, that means pretty much everything! The love of God and love of neighbor is meant to flow into our entire lives.

The Gospel can appear complicated because life is complicated. Not every outcast is easy to love. We lack the knowledge or compassion to heal everyone who suffers. Personal sacrifice is not always noticed or valued. In the face of the unknown, fear can be easier than faith. Life's circumstances can seem like obstacles to God's love, not opportunities. And yet Jesus' command still stands. As you reflect this week, examine those areas where it's easy to love. Thank God for them! But take some time to consider the people and circumstances that challenge you. Ask God to show you what it means to love there. How is He inviting you to enlarge your heart, strengthen your soul, open your mind, and persevere in your strength? How is He inviting you to love?

*"Our perfection
does not consist of doing
extraordinary things,
but to do the ordinary well."*

--St. Gabriel Possenti



*Everyday Stewardship
Recognize God in Your Ordinary Moments*

You can ask many Christians if God is the most important person in their life, and without much thought, they will respond, "Yes." However, just saying it does not make it true. It is the answer that we have been programmed to give, but I am not sure most people reflect too long on what the answer really means. Is God more important to you than all your worldly possessions? Is God more important to you than your spouse or your children?

Oftentimes, we would like to believe that God holds the most important position in our lives, but our actions give us away. We do and say things demonstrating that position of top importance belongs to things, circumstances, or simply ourselves. If we placed God first in our lives, we would be more generous, happier, and more fulfilled. The amazing thing here is that the ultimate self-help action is to turn from our own wants and desires and focus all that energy on God. We actually help ourselves the most by thinking of ourselves the least and turning it all over to someone else. Of course, God knows that. God does not ultimately benefit by anything we give Him. The fruits come to us by putting Him at the top of the list. Then we give Him those fruits to find we have now even more than when we started.

How important is God in your life? Your answer could be the key to life that you have been looking for all along.

--Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

*Lord, come to our aid!
Grant us peace, teach us peace;
guide our steps in the way of peace.
Instill in our hearts the courage
to take concrete steps to achieve peace.
Amen.*