

Fr. Ron Serrao's Homily 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time ~ Year A

At the start of a counseling session, a couple introduced themselves by saying: "Father, I'm Francis, and this is my wife Betty, my calvary." The wife hastened to say, "Yes Father, this is my husband Francis, my purgatory!"

In today's Gospel (Mt. 22, 34-40), Jesus sums up all the commandments into two: Love of God, and love of neighbor as oneself. Love is the vision. Love is the mission. Love is the key, the answer to all our problems and questions. With love, we can overcome all our calvaries and purgatories.

They say that money makes the world go round. Not true. It is love that makes the world go round. Maybe not as fast as the way money makes it, but, slowly and surely. Moreover, there will always be people who are willing to sacrifice, go the extra mile, stand up for their principles, and do what is noble and right. The world is not a hopeless situation, after all. It is not a broken world as long as we do not become cynical about love. When money dwindles, we panic. All the more if love dwindles.

Love is the greatest gift and the greatest responsibility in our lives. If you look back into your life and into your heart, you'd realize that the happiest moments happened because you loved, and the saddest moments happened because you were selfish. The evil one makes us focus on money. God makes us focus on love. What are you looking at? What is your focus in life? Is it possible to love God to the max? With all of one's heart and soul? Not really. We can love Him above all though. And love Him in spite of all. Yes, we must continue loving, for that is our mission and calling.

Forget the big things, the great tomorrows when you intend to do your loving. The time and the place to love is in your present reality, in your here and now. Whatever you do, just remember what Mother Teresa once said: "It's not what you do in life, but how much love you put into it that matters."

But how and in what way can we love our God whom we do not see? It is through our neighbors. Thus, when a Christian serves the poor in the name of Christ, it is actually Christ our God, in and through us, who continues to touch and console the poor. Another one is, when the community of the Church, the people who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and God, gathers for the celebration of the Eucharist, it is actually Jesus in His Spirit-filled community who offers Himself to the Father. To summarize it, we are the perfect sacrament of love of Jesus Christ.

But who are my neighbors? Is it the house near to my house too? Maybe, but those people who are in need of our material, emotional and spiritual helps. They are in need of our concern, care, love and compassion and this is a concrete manifestation of our love for God. It is through our neighbors whom we see.

For example, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, she expressed her love for God by serving the poorest of the poor and the most abandoned people in the society that she was in. Therefore love of God and love of neighbor are identical twins I would say. They could not be separated and one could not exist without the other. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept the two as part of our lives. Can we do this?

This love of God and love of neighbor is symbolized by the two beams of the cross. It is our call to balance the vertical dimension of our relationship with God in prayer and sacrifices with the horizontal dimension of our relationship with others in mutual and loving service. So, if we take away the vertical dimension or detach either beam, you'll obtain neither love of God nor love of neighbor, there is no sign of the cross and we are not true Christian Catholics.

To love God above all sounds great but are we aware how often we violate the first important commandment? Too often, things come first in our life when we say, 'family first,' or 'earning enough money first,' or 'work first.' This is fine and good but where does God come in? I'm sure not in the first place but in the last.

Every Sunday we are gathered in our church in order to pray and worship God. During the offertory, we offer our money in the collection basket but we offer too, our pains, our hurts, our sacrifices, the struggles of the past week and so on.

In other words, a true Christian is not only prayerful, but must also be helpful and sharer of the gospel. True prayer must bear fruit in real life, and real life must in turn lead to deeper prayer.