

**30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle - A; Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> 2023  
Exodus 22: 20-26; 1Thesslonians 1: 5-10; Matthew 22: 34-40**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. the pagan Greek Philosopher Aristides wrote to the Roman Emperor Hadrian about the Christians, while the persecution was severe against them. He wrote, **“Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If one of them has something, he gives freely to those who have nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home and are happy as though he were a real brother. They don’t consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers through the Spirit, in God. And if they hear that one of them is in jail or persecuted for professing the name of their Redeemer, they give him all he needs. There is something divine in them.”**

The above statement makes it clear that even the non-Christians could not but appreciate the Christians’ love of God which is reflected in the love of neighbor. Even today Christians are known among the non-Christians for their charitable works irrespective of caste, religion and nations. If the Jews considered only a member of his community as his neighbor, the Christians consider everyone who is in need of help to be their brother and sister and neighbor. The entire teaching of Jesus can be summarized just in one Commandment, **“LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR.”** In many ways Jesus’ teaching was different from the ordinary Jewish Rabbi.

The scribes and Pharisees considered Jesus as a Mosaic Law breaker. For, he gave the real interpretation of the Law which was alien to them. But to their surprise, to the question of the scholar in today’s Gospel, **“Which commandment is the greatest of all?”** **Jesus just repeated the First Commandment which was described in Dt.6: 4- 5, “Hear O, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”** But Jesus didn’t stop with that rather he added to it the statute given in **Lev. 19: 18, which reads, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** *Thus Jesus makes it very clear that the Love of God without Love of neighbor is incomplete and love of neighbor without love of God is unreal.* **St. John in his first letter chapter 4: 20 says, “If anyone says, “I love God, but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. No one has seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought**

**perfection in us.”** This is a warning for the ones who claim to be pious and religious who claim to love God but don't care for their neighbor.

Mother Theresa is the greatest humanitarian worker, the modern world has ever seen. Every time when she picked up a starving or dying person from the street of Calcutta, people wondered how she could do that. Her answer was very simple, **“I see the face of Jesus in that person.”** She always warned her nuns against the challenges they could face in loving their neighbor. At the same time these hurdles can be met with only if human beings are motivated by love and respect for one another which looks beyond faults, differences, ulterior motives, success and failure. **Mother Theresa once said of herself, “By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the heart of Jesus.”** Yes only the one whose heart belongs to Jesus can do such humanitarian works.

**Christianity is not the religion of legalism and ritualism. It is the religion of love.** Christians are supposed to see the face of Jesus in everybody they meet. If our worship and love of God remain in the four walls of this Church and if it is not expressed through our good works for the poor and the needy outside, then our religion is dry and dead. We cannot be the followers of Jesus. The late Arch Bishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero, who was assassinated by the enemies of social justice, said once in his homily, **“A religion of Sunday Mass but unjust week ahead does not please God. A religion of much praying but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian. A Church that sets itself up only to be well off, to have a lot of money and comfort but that forgets to protest against injustices in the world, not to be the true Church.”**

It does not mean that we should not participate in Sunday Mass or do our personal prayers. But our attendance of Mass and personal prayers should give us inspiration to do something good to someone, and only then they will have the full meaning. Remember, the scene of the Last Judgment described in Matthew 25: 31-46; Here Jesus makes it very clear that only our charitable works will bring us eternal life; we are judged over our good deeds or bad deeds which we did for or against our neighbors. In other words our eternal life or eternal death depends on what good we have done or what we have denied to do for our fellow beings.