

THE THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Dt 6:2-6; Ps 18:2-3,3-4,47,51; Heb 7:23-28; Mk 12:28-34

GO AHEAD: LOVE YOURSELF

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, November 3, 2018, 5:00 and 7:30 p.m. Masses

Sunday, November 4, 2018, 8:30 a.m. Mass

Today's gospel is the **Great Commandment**.
We have heard it a million times.
It has been **drilled** into us **over** and **over again**.
The whole Mosaic **Law**, the entire **gospel**,
can be boiled down into **two things**:
 love God,
 and,
 love your neighbor.

Or, is it **just two** things?
Has **something** been **overlooked**?

Let's **listen again** to the Great Commandment.
Please check for how many aspects there are.

Jesus said,
 "**Love** the Lord your **God**,"
 and, "**Love** your **neighbor** as **yourself**."

If we pay very careful attention to this,
we have **three elements**, not two.

There is:
 love of **God**,
 love of **neighbor**,
 and love of **self**.

When we read about the Great Commandment,
or when we hear homilies about the Great Commandment,
writers and preachers drill down on:
 love of God and love of neighbor,
 and **love of self barely gets any attention**.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"
and he means it – both parts – the **neighbor part** and the **self part**.

I had a spiritual director.
He knew that is was a little obsessive about work,
or maybe a little over-conscientious when it comes to my duties.
He had a saying that he repeated many times:
“**Responsible ministry begins with self-care.**”
It **sounds selfish**, doesn’t it?
But it is **not!**

If we don’t take good care of ourselves,
we are not going to be any good for anyone else.

So Jesus says that we are supposed to **love ourselves**.
It is very important to be **careful** about what Jesus means.
There are **aspects** to **self-love** that are **healthy** and **beneficial**,
and there are **aspects** to **self-love** that are **dysfunctional** and **detrimental**.

What do you think about this?
“I love me. I’m so attractive.
When I look at myself in the mirror,
I am enthralled with myself.
I am a wonderful sight behold.”

What do you think?
This is **narcissism**, an unhealthy psychological condition.
Jesus certainly does not mean this when he says, “Love yourself.”

What about this one?
“I love me.
I’m just better than other people.
I’m smarter. My ideas are better.
I deserve to be in charge.
People ought to listen to me,
and they ought to look up to me.”

What do you think?
This is **pride** or **arrogance** – and it is a **capital sin**.

Here is another one.
“I love me.
I deserve to get what I want.
I get to go first.
I get to pick the TV channel.
I get decide where we are going out to eat.
I am going to be nice to myself,
nice house, nice clothes, nice car, the best stuff.

What do you think about this one?
It is pure **selfishness**,
and certainly not what Jesus means when he says, “Love yourself.”

So then, **what does Jesus mean** when he says, “**Love yourself**”? (Mk 12:31).

God expects us to take good care of ourselves.
Responsible self-care is to “love yourself” (Mk 12:31).

We cannot love our neighbor
if we are sick, mentally incapacitated, exhausted, or dead.

It is an act of **self-hatred** to **not take care of ourselves**,
and if we hate ourselves
we will break down,
die prematurely,
squander God’s gifts,
and fall short in loving our neighbor.

Love of neighbor **requires** inner strength and **personal wellness**.

There are at least **four major dimensions** to **decent self-care**:
our **spiritual** health,
our **physical** health,
our **social** health,
and our **intellectual** health.

Spiritual self-care means that we take out time each and every day to pray:
quiet time, meditation time, Scripture reading time, spiritual reading time.
Every week we ought to come together for Mass,
for the Liturgy of the Word, to be fed with the Scriptures;
for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, to be fed with Jesus’ Body and Blood;
for fellowship,
to gather with the community and draw strength from fellow believers.

It is an act of **self-hatred** to let our **spiritual health slide**.
But, if we take good care of our spiritual health,
which is a way to love ourselves,
and when we are in **good shape spiritually**,
we have a **solid foundation** from which we can **love our neighbor**.

When Jesus said “**love yourself**,” he also meant this **physically**.

It is an act of self-love to take good care of our bodies.
Physical self-care means that we
get enough sleep, eat a well-balanced diet,
exercise regularly, try to maintain the proper weight,
avoid drugs, dress properly,
drive carefully.

It is an act of **self-hatred** to **abuse our bodies**.

When we are **responsible stewards** of the **health** that God has given us,
it is a way for us to “**love yourself**.”

When we are in **good shape physically**,
we are **better able to love our neighbor**.

When Jesus said “**love yourself**,” he also meant this **socially**.

It is an act of self-love to have a network of good friends.

Our friends are a reflection of who we are and the values we hold,

which is why it is so important to travel in a good crowd rather than bad company.

God doesn’t want people to be alone (Gn 2:18; Tb 8:6).

A good friend is a sturdy shelter, a treasure (Sir 6:14), priceless (Sir 6:15),

a source of encouragement and companionship, strength and joy.

It is an act of self-hatred to isolate one’s self,

and spend one’s days lonely, miserable, and mired in self-pity.

But it is an act of self-love to reach to others, and make friends,

whether it be at school, at work, at church,

on one’s block, in one’s building, or wherever.

When we are well-connected to other people,

whether on the playground or the school bus, or in the break room,

in the hunting shack or playing cards,

when we have a **healthy network of good friends**

we are much **better able to love our neighbor**.

Finally, when Jesus said “**love yourself**,” he also means **intellectually**.

It is an act of **self-love** to **cultivate** our God-given **mental capacity**.

We are good stewards of our minds when we

go to class, study hard, and do our homework;

read the newspaper, read magazines, read books;

watch educational programming, stay informed about the news,

and hang around wise people.

A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

It is an act of self-hatred to let our minds go to mush.

Jesus wants us love “**love yourself**” by being **mentally sharp**,

because if we can be “**on the ball**” **intellectually**

we will be much **better able to love our neighbor**.

“**Love yourself**” (Mk 12:31).

When Jesus says, “*Love yourself*” (12:31),

he is not giving us permission to be narcissistic, prideful, or selfish.

Rather, Jesus is asking us to take good care of ourselves,

because we cannot care for our neighbors if we are in bad shape.

If we will accept **Jesus’ invitation to be good stewards** of

our **spiritual lives**, our **physical health**, our **relationships**, and our **minds**,

then we will be **well-equipped to love our neighbors as ourselves**.