# Loving God and Our Neighbor

Homily Transcript | Timestamps Removed

So, just in case you're wondering, I am doing better. So thank you for your prayers.

The questions I have for you really are these: What would the world look like if everybody lived today's Gospel? And what would our lives look like if we really loved the way that God wants us to love both Him and our neighbor?

You know, those are the questions that came to my mind as I reflected on today's Gospel invitation to love God and our neighbor. And I call it an invitation because, if you really stop and think about it, God's commandments are not rules that we must follow to get Him to love us. No, they're actually instructions to help us rightly order our lives so we can live in an intimate relationship with Him and with each other.

Now, in today's Gospel, a Pharisee asked Jesus which commandment of the law was the greatest. You've probably heard this before, but the law has 613 commandments that a faithful Jewish person would try to follow. These laws taught them how to live before God and before each other. And breaking or neglecting one of these commandments could be understood as weakening their commitment to all the rest. So when the Pharisee asked Jesus this question, everybody was watching to see how He would answer.

Jesus got right to the heart of it. He said, out of all those 613 commandments, they really depend on just these two: Love God with everything you've got - your heart, your mind, your soul - and love everybody else just as you love yourself.

Now, I don't know about you, but I sometimes struggle with these two commandments. For example, while driving to work on 436 in the morning, people always want to drive up the right-hand turn lane and then cut in front of me at the last possible second so they can get past all the other people on the road. Now, if my love for neighbor and love for God is reflected in how I feel inside sometimes, I've got a little ways to go to love God more fully.

But what does it mean to love God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind? And how am I supposed to love others like myself?

I guess one way to describe it is to compare it with the love that you have for the person you love the most. When you love somebody, it affects what you choose and what you desire and how you understand things - really, how you live. Now, I might not like to wear a particular shirt that my wife likes me to wear, or maybe to eat at some of the restaurants that she likes to eat at. But you know what? I'll wear that shirt and I'll go to those restaurants. Why?

Well, not to get her to love me, but to show, as an expression of my love for her, by doing that. It's the same thing with God. We don't really follow His commands to get Him to love us, but as an expression of the love that we already have for Him because of the love that He's proven He has for us.

Instead, He wants us to love Him and to show our love for Him through our obedience and through our actions. So how do we develop this love for God? Well, we remember that He loved us first. He gave His life for us. And when He did that, He did it when we really didn't deserve to have that love. If we reflect on this truth every day, I believe our love for God will continue to grow until we love Him with all that we have and all that we are.

And as our love for Him deepens, it's going to overflow into every area of our life, enabling us to love others in the way that He's called us to love them.

One of my favorite books, and it's one that I read every year, is titled Hinds' Feet on High Places. It's an allegory about a soul on a journey with the Chief Shepherd to the mountains of love. And that love is the soul's love for God and God's love for the soul. It's a love that, like water which flows from the greatest heights down to the lowest valleys, overflows from our loving relationship with God and pours itself out into the lives of others.

Now, these two commandments - to love God and to love our neighbor - are not for God's benefit. They're for ours. God invites us to live out these commandments so that we can enter more fully into the intimate relationship that He desires us to have with Him and with each other.

And I think that's where the challenge lies. It's one thing to know that God loves us, but it's another to reflect on the depth of that love daily and to allow it to reform our hearts. As our love for Him deepens, it's going to overflow naturally in the way that we live and the way that we treat others, even when it's difficult. After all, we can only love others well when we truly understand how deeply we're loved by Him.

So how do we enter into this intimate relationship with God if we don't really think we're quite there yet? Well, let me ask you: How do you enter into a deeper relationship with any person?

I didn't hear any answers, but that's okay. You spend quality time with them, right? You get to know them, you walk with them, you talk with them, you do things with them. You make a commitment to them that shapes your entire life - your actions, your affections, your choices, your understanding, the way you live. And it's no different with God. You're actually doing it right now, this morning. You're here.

You're with your fellow brothers and sisters in His presence, with His people. You're hearing His Word in the Scriptures spoken to you, and you're preparing your heart right now to receive Him - Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity - into your own body.

But we shouldn't just give Him one hour each week. When you love someone, spending only an hour each week just doesn't feel like enough, right? Right. Good answer. You want to spend more time with them.

So spend time with God every day. Talk with Him in the morning before anybody else in the house gets up or in the evening after everyone else has gone to bed. It doesn't have to be a long, drawn-out, formal set of prayers. It can be as simple as, "Good morning, Papa. Thank You for

this day. What are You going to lead me to today?" Or at night, "Good night, Papa. Thank You for today. Here's how my day went. I'm sorry where I failed You. Help me to do better tomorrow."

And then just sit there quietly with Him, opening your heart to Him just like you would with a trusted friend. Read a little bit of Scripture each day so you can hear Him speak to you.

My brother, 40 years ago when he was coming into the faith, I told him, "You know, there's a proverb for every day of the month. Read a proverb." And he's been doing that for 40 years. It's deepened his relationship with Christ in such a way that I go to him when I seek advice and I need prayer. I call him up on the phone.

Just sit with Him. Take that time. If life is great, that's fantastic. If life is hard, go to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Make that holy hour.

I just had lunch with a friend recently, and I noticed something had changed in him since the last time we'd gotten together. He was more at peace, and he was reaching out to other people, ministering to them on the weekends. His relationship with God had grown deeper because he started spending daily time with the Lord. Matter of fact, he spends a holy hour every week with the Lord.

As I've grown older, I've come to understand what St. John teaches in 1 John 4:7-21 and what Jesus tells us in today's Gospel: Everything that truly matters in life centers on God's love - what He's done for us and continues to do for us, and how we respond by honoring and serving Him with gratitude.

We show love for God through a life of faith and obedience. Love's not simply a feeling. It means living as God wants us to live in our relationships with Him and in the way that we treat our neighbors.

So today, I invite you to reflect on the Gospel and ask yourself what your relationships with God and others are like. And if they're not what Jesus is inviting you into today, turn to Him. Start spending time with Him and let Him help you grow in your relationships. That's what it's all about. God created us to live in an intimate relationship of love with Him and with each other, and everything in life flows from these two commandments.

So I'm going to ask you again: What would the world look like today if everybody lived the Gospel? And what would our lives look like if we followed Jesus in His commandments to love God fully and to love our neighbors as ourselves?

You know what I think it would look like? I think it would look like God's Kingdom fully breaking into our world. So let's make that happen.