Love Made Visible: Loving God and Our Neighbor

So, I got to watch a lot of baseball this weekend. My son Peter had a baseball tournament. Yesterday, Peter, who's a catcher, was playing, and they were doing well. They were winning the game. One of the hitters hit the ball, and Peter started to run to back up first base when the batter threw the bat. It hit him right in the elbow, and he went down like a bag of rocks. He's fine. He played again today. He's okay.

But as he got to the dugout, the coach said to the teammates, "Hey, take care of your teammates." And one of the kids said, "Oh, I'll get some ice. I'll get him a drink of water." What a great example of loving your neighbor, right? I think we all see those examples in our daily lives: taking care of your teammates, loving your neighbor.

Well, at the end of their games, there was another game between two teams from Winter Park. A lot of the kids were from St. Margaret Mary. So I said, "Peter, let's stay and we'll watch." And so we watched the game. One of the young men—and these guys are 12 years old—got up to bat. His name is Luca. Great kid, great family. I've known him for a long time. He hits an absolute line drive to left field. I thought for sure it was a base hit, maybe a double. The kid made a diving catch and stole it from him.

Right? So as an 11- or 12-year-old, you're disappointed, and you're upset. Well, what Luca did was, as he rounded first base, instead of being upset or mad or frustrated, he gave him a little clap. He ran back to the dugout, got ready, and went on. I thought, what a great example of loving your neighbor, even when they're your opponent. Even when they're your opponent.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says two things. He says that we have to love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. And the two are connected.

Just a little context of what's happening during this Gospel: the Sadducees and the Pharisees kept trying to trick Jesus. They tried to trick him on taxes, on the resurrection of the body, and now they brought in the lawyer—the big guns—and they tried to trick him again. But he doesn't take the bait. They ask, "What's the most important commandment?" And what Jesus says is that it's love. He says at the end of that that it's the whole Law and all the Prophets. That's the totality of the Jewish faith at that time. They had over 600 different commandments, but the totality of their faith was centered on love.

And because he himself is the Gospel, he himself is our truth of the New Testament, you take all of the Law and the Prophets, the totality of the Old Testament, and Jesus Christ himself, and our faith is all centered on love. First from the love of God, and then us loving God back, and us loving our neighbor.

And he says that we should love God with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind. What does it mean to love God with all of your heart? I think about it as my heart being habitually connected, or habitually focused, on God. In everything that I do in my day, my daily life, my daily tasks, what is the choice that I'm making? Am I making a choice that would be self-serving, or am I making a Christian choice, the choice that God would want me to make? Of course, we'll make mistakes. We stub our toe, and we bring those mistakes to Christ, we bring them to the sacraments. But is my heart habitually centered on Christ in all that I do?

What does it mean to love God with all of your soul? Well, what are your desires? Are your desires to draw closer to God? Are your desires to use the gifts that God has given you for the good of others, or

are they selfish desires? What are your impulses? What is your inner life and your inner relationship with Christ? And if those desires are to love God, to deepen your relationship with him, that's how you love God with your soul.

And what about how we love God with our mind? We're kind of doing that right now, because we're looking at what the Scripture says, what it means. What is he asking of us in that Scripture, and what is he asking of us in our life?

So we love God with all of our heart, we love God with all of our soul, we love God with all of our mind. And it's directly connected to how we love our neighbor. You see, our love of God is manifested in our actions toward each other. How we love God becomes visible in how we treat one another, how we love our neighbor.

And that first reading, it can challenge us, can't it? It's not just about loving our teammates; it's about loving everybody. It's like Luca giving a little clap to his opponent. Christ doesn't qualify that to say, "Love your neighbor—your friends and your family, the guy who lets you use your lawnmower." He doesn't qualify it. And in that first reading, he challenges us.

The first thing he says is that we should love the alien. Now in today's society, in today's world, as we sit in that pew and we think Christ is calling us to love the immigrant, to love the refugee, how does that sit in our heart? Does it challenge you? Does it make it difficult? And the Church doesn't say that a country can't have laws and that we shouldn't have a justice system. But our laws and our justice system should be compassionate. They should be based on love and dignity.

That first reading continues. It says if somebody owes you money, that you should still love them. That might hit even a little bit closer to home because that could be your security, your family's security, your financial well-being. Do you still love them? Do you still love them?

That reading also talks about loving people on the fringes. It talks about loving the widows and the orphans. Do we love the people on the fringes in our own society? Do we love the prisoners who've committed crimes? Do we love people who suffer from substance abuse? Do we love the homeless, the man on the side who's trying to collect some money?

God doesn't qualify who our neighbor is. Do we love the most vulnerable? Do we love those who are elderly and in a nursing home, in the last part of their lives? Do we show them love and care? Do we love the unborn child? Do we care for them?

Do we love those people on the fringes? Do we love that criminal who's sitting on death row, who's committed horrible crimes? Do we love them? Because God doesn't qualify who our neighbor is. He says that we love our neighbor.

The Sadducees and the Pharisees and the scribe tried to trick Jesus, but he didn't fall for it. Instead, what he did was take our faith and root it in love. He rooted it in love. He said to love God, to love our Lord with all of our heart, to love him with all of our soul, to love him with all of our mind. And our love of God becomes visible in how we treat one another.

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