

# Reflection for the 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/102923.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Ex 22:20-26*

The Ten Commandments are given in Exodus 20:1-17, then follow several other commandments until the end of Chapter 23. All in all, Rabbi Maimonides, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, counted 613 commandments in the first five books of Scripture. Three Hundred Sixty-five are negative, thou shalt not, and 248 positive, thou shalt. Today's first reading gives us two of these additional commandments which focus on how to treat others.

## **2nd Reading:** *1 Thes 1:5-10*

Today's selection from Paul's letters continues from last week where you will remember Paul is telling the Thessalonians how they have become so well known for their faith. He continues in his praise of them and points out how their faith has been fruitful as an example for other communities.

## **Gospel:** *Mt 22:34-40*

**"...You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** Mt 34:39

### **Reflection on the Gospel:**

When I was in grade school, I learned that you had to love everyone, but you didn't have to like them. That's not scriptural, by the way.

The word we translate as "love" in the command to love God is the Greek word *agapaō*. It involves a deep level of affection and intimacy. The Gospel of Mark uses it when he tells us that Jesus had this kind of love for the rich young man who went away sad. (Mk 10:21) John tells us that this is the kind of love Jesus had for the beloved disciple. (Jn 13:23) The Gospel of John also tells us that the Father loves the Son with this kind of love. (Jn 3:35) Mark and Luke, like Matthew, tell us that this is the kind of love we are to have for God. (Mk 12:30 & Lk 10:27)

The word translated as "love" in the commandment to love our neighbor is... exactly the same word, *agapaō*, involving a deep level of affection and intimacy. I don't see any room here for us not to like the person we are supposed to love. It is even the same word used where Scripture tells us we have to love our enemies. (Mt 5:44 & Lk 6:27) Wow! How is that even possible?

Some people are difficult for some other people to love; We say there is a personality conflict. Some people have hurt us and may be continuing in their hurtful actions; how can we not feel disdain for them? Some people act out in ways that we believe are wrong, maybe even sinful. Why would Jesus want us to love them?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr had some ideas. In his sermon at Dexter Ave. Baptist Church on Nov 17, 1957, he said: "I think the first reason that we should love our enemies, and I think this was at the very center of Jesus' thinking, is this: that hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you and you hit me and I hit you back and you hit me back and go on, you see,

that goes on ad infinitum. [tapping on pulpit] It just never ends. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that's the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil."

Dr. King gave a couple of other reasons, then went on to say; "Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, "Love your enemies." It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. That's why Jesus says, "Love your enemies." Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption.

You just keep loving people and keep loving them, even though they're mistreating you. Here's the person who is a neighbor, and this person is doing something wrong to you and all of that. Just keep being friendly to that person. Keep loving them. Don't do anything to embarrass them. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with bitterness because they're mad because you love them like that. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them.

And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies."

But does it really work? Here is an example from <https://www2.cbn.com/video/700-club/ex-muslim-speaks-out-about-koran-dilemma>

A Saudi Muslim, who goes by the pseudonym Al Fadi, decided to attend college in the West - in the very backyard of his sworn enemies. He like all radicalized Muslims was taught to hate Christians and Westerners. He was a follower of Bin Ladin and planned to promote Islam to anyone who would listen.

For the first time in his life, he actually met and spent time with Christians. He said "Basically, the more I met people who follow Christ, the more I realized that they are distinct and unique in their character. They're kind, they're patient, they're loving, they have moral values, they don't look at others with hatred."

He continued with "At some point I heard the teaching of Christ to love your enemies. Technically speaking, I am their enemy, and they didn't hate me, they actually loved me." He eventually put his life in jeopardy and became Christian. That's why he goes by a pseudonym.

Here is an example a little closer to home. I read a review on the internet of the parish that I was pastor of. Someone said he felt the presence of God among us? That wasn't so strange. I'd read that before, but he was a Muslim. He is one of the ones I know that visited us during the Ramadan fasting several years ago. That is the effect love is supposed to have although I have to admit there were some in the parish that faulted me for allowing Muslims into our worship space.

So how do we get there? Dr. King said that we should start by looking at ourselves. He said we should look for the things about ourselves that might cause the hate response in others in order that we might understand their dislike for us. He seemed to mean that then we could understand those who dislike us and I think he's right.

Dr. King's second suggestion is to look for the good in the other. Recognize that the other, just like us is a combination of good and bad.

Then there is Dorothy Day's prayer. I got this from the movie *Entertaining Angels*. She was working with street people and at one time she prayed, "Lord, show me what it is that you like about these people. I think they stink!" Yet she loved them. This recognizes that all people, the good and the bad are God's children and He knows how to love them in spite of the negative stuff.

In our day-to-day lives, we need to try to avoid hatred and fear and put our trust in God. Not to the extent that we throw away caution and common sense but to the extent that we avoid hatred and fear. It may not be easy to know where that line is but if we are going to try to live the Gospel, we have to actually try.

### **For Personal Reflection:**

"This (the commandment to love God) is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." Mt 22:38-40

#### **Question:**

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

#### **Alternative:**

Reflect upon/Share about a story from your own life that illustrates what love means to you. What would it look like if you applied that concept of love to the neighbor whom Jesus is talking about, the hard ones to love? What can you change in your life, this week, to help you show your love for people more of what Jesus is asking for?

### **Verse by Verse:**

Mt 22:34 "When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees..." | We skipped a section after the Pharisees and Herodians left Jesus. (Mt22:22) In the section we skipped, Sadducees asked Jesus a question about resurrection which they didn't believe in. (Mt 22:23-33)

Mt 22:35 "...a scholar of the law tested him..." | This is the third story in a row wherein the high priests, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and now Sadducees were antagonistic toward Jesus and tried to trip him up.

Mt 22:36 "...which commandment in the law is the greatest?" | Rabbi Maimonides, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, counted 613 laws written in the Torah, 248 positive and 365 negative. (SP)

Mt 22:37 "...You shall love the Lord, your God..." | This law was well known by the Jewish people of Jesus' time. It is, and was, recited several times a day by pious Jewish people as part of the Schema. (SP) It appears in Deut 6:5.

Mt 22:39 "The second is like it..." | This is the import of Jesus' answer. Any rabbi, of Jesus' day, would have agreed with his choice of these two commandments. Jesus' uniqueness is in equating the two as being equally important. (JBC) Mark's telling of this story simply says, "The second is...". JBC states that Jesus' connecting of these two commandments makes them effectively one.

Mt 22:39 "...You shall love your neighbor as yourself." | This is a quotation from Lv 19:18. Again, the Jewish people of Jesus' day would have known this law. In Lv 19, neighbor means other Jewish people and any foreigners living among them. UBSH says that Jesus' usage expands the meaning to include anyone with whom you come into contact. Jesus even expanded it to include loving your enemy, Mt 5:38-42, Mt 5:42-48, and Lk 6:27-36.

The Law about loving your neighbor is repeated in Rom 13:9, Gal 5:14 & James 2:8. Lk tells the story in a different context and completes it by having the scribe ask the question "Who is your neighbor?" and he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Remember, Samaritans were hated by Jewish people of the time. Mt later ties these two commandments together in Mt 25:40 by saying whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me.

Mt 22:40 "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." | This is a strong statement meaning that the law and the prophets are meaningless without these two. The Greek word we translate as "depend" means "hangs on".