

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Why Love?”

Fr. Frank Schuster

I have a confession to make. I don't particularly enjoy watching baseball. I know that I am going out on a limb here given that the World Series is going on, but since by nature I am a little hyper active, I have some attention deficit traits (“shiny object squirrel” that's me), watching baseball by myself is like watching the grass grow. It is sooooo slow. Painful! On the other hand, I love watching baseball with my dad. Why? The reason for this is that he really loves baseball. He knows every player's name, he knows whatever back story or drama is going on with the teams, and he knows a lot of history with regard to the sport. And so, when I am over at my parents' house and a baseball game is on, I can say I enjoy watching baseball, not because I am particularly fond of the sport, but because my dad likes it...and so therefore I do too. Follow? Bishop Barron gives this insight in his Word of Fire homily this week (and does a better job at it so check it out) but I think we can all relate going to a movie, a concert, a lecture, a sporting event or a camping trip that we wouldn't have gone to by ourselves but nevertheless enjoyed it precisely because we were with someone or group of people who enjoyed it and so therefore we did too.

With this backdrop, let's approach our Gospel Reading this weekend. Jesus gives us the summary of what it means to be his disciple and so this is one of the most important passages in the bible that we would do well to memorize. Just like last weekend, we have the Pharisees present trying to entrap Jesus with a tricky question, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest”? It was a very tricky question because, as I have shared with you in the past, remember how many laws there are in the Torah? 613! The Pharisees were looking forward to hearing what Jesus would say and then railroad him by arguing for a different law. Get it? They didn't get the chance though because Jesus' answer demonstrated his mastery of the Torah. Jesus gives us the summary of the Torah, indeed a wonderful summary of the meaning of life when he tells the Pharisees, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Let's begin with the first commandment, do we really love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind? There is so much competing for our attention in this world, do we really place God first? More thoughts from Bishop Barron, did you know the Old English for worship is “*weorthscipe*”, which means “worthiness, acknowledgement of worth”? We worship that which has the most worth. What has the most worth to you? That is what you are worshipping. There are so many things we try to collect in this life that we think have worth but eventually fail to satisfy. There is a God shaped hole in our hearts that only God can satisfy but we fill it with things that eventually turn to dust. Saint Augustine after years trying to find happiness in the world, and failing over and over again, finally came to the conclusion that God made us for himself and so our hearts are restless until they rest in him. When our hearts finally rest in God, all the other things we value in our lives find their proper place. When we worship God, we are making a decision to place God first in our lives in such a way that, at the end of our days, our lives should not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Jesus. Let me say that again, our lives should not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Christ. Because we worship Jesus, our lives should reflect that reality in every way, beginning

with prayer, attending church, how we spend our time during the week and the relationships we keep. Which leads us to the second commandment...

Jesus says the second command is like the first: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". It seems easy enough to say, to comprehend and yet frustratingly confounding to put into practice. The reason for this is because we are sinners. What can help us with this commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves is to begin by reflecting on what our motivations are with loving others. By nature, we humans operate more on a principle of reciprocity, I will love you if you will love me back. If you do not love me, why would I love you? God does not operate that way. Every human being on the face of the planet has been made in the image and likeness of God, even if they don't behave that way. God loves each person in this world, and so should we. Back to watching baseball with my dad. I personally do not prefer to watch baseball, but I love watching baseball because I know my dad does. Follow? I may not personally like a different political party member, or a particular person who follows a different religion, I may not like someone in my neighborhood or work because of his/her lifestyle, or someone in my life who has hurt me, and I may be completely honest that I don't ever see myself being a close friend with any of them, but I am nevertheless called to love them. Why? Because God created them in his image and likeness, God loves them and so should I. I need to find a way to love them even if I don't like them. Got it?

A great example of this is right there for us in our first reading today from Exodus, "Thus says the LORD: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry." The reason why Exodus is addressing these issues is because their community was struggling with them. Every generation struggles with these issues. And so, if you ever ask yourself the question, why does the Church take a stand in support of immigrants, for those who are poor and for those experiencing homelessness in our society, here you go. Even if we find ourselves struggling with these issues and perhaps differ on solutions, bottom line as Catholics, God loves these people...and so should we.

My friends, we have been given the summary of Christian life this Sunday, haven't we? We shall love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. As Catholics we are called to put God first in everything because God created us, has given us life and he has loved us first. Our lives must therefore reflect that and our lives should honestly not make sense to anyone who doesn't know Christ. Secondly, we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. We love others not because we are naturally predisposed to like everyone out there. We are not. And this does not mean we condone sin or sacrifice truth in our relationships because love is also honest, love tells the truth. Nevertheless, even with the most difficult people we find ourselves dealing with each week, as disciples of Jesus we must find a way to love them even if that love is not reciprocated because, bottom line, God loves them and so should we.