

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily
July 14, 2019
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

The Gospel today starts with the question from a lawyer, posed to Jesus. He asked: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Suppose that Jesus said, "That's simple. Love the Lord your God with all our heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. That's all." With that reply many people will be happy, because many are regular churchgoers like you and me. They spend extra time in prayer at church and at home. They cherish their Bibles and attend church activities. Loving God is not new. It's their priority. But Jesus did not answer that way.

Suppose Jesus said: "How do you get to heaven? Easy, just love your neighbor as yourself. Period!" With this answer, again, many people will rejoice because loving others is second nature to them. They are naturally helpful and generous. They share with the poor. They give to charities. They avoid giving offense to others and they sincerely respect the rights and dignity of the people around them. But Jesus did not answer this way.

Why? For Jesus, it is important that his followers learn to love in a complete way. To love God, to enhance your vertical gaze to heaven, to truly apply yourself to prayer and worship each day but ignore your neighbor and his needs, is incomplete love.

To love your neighbor, to have good horizontal relationships with men and women, and to assist them in their need but forgetting God's invitation to come closer to him, is, again, incomplete. Jesus offers us a fuller experience of love, a more complete way of living in love.

Jesus guided the lawyer to discover that love has two aspects – vertical, fixed on true adoration and friendship with God, and horizontal, experienced in loving service of fellow men and women. Jesus leads us to realize that love must be complete because this complete love assures us of the promise of eternal life.

As Christians, we are enlightened by Jesus that there is an unbroken connection between these two aspects of love. Our love for God must disturb us and bring us to the presence of our neighbor. Love for God needs proof. Can you really love God whom you do not see, if you despise your brother whom you see? - asks the Epistle of John

Our love for neighbor must get its inspiration from the God of love who purifies our intentions and teaches us the value of sacrifice. There are times when loving our neighbor is not easy. We cannot force ourselves to accept and welcome people we do not like. But God's love strengthens us to have a universal love, extending to people and situations we find difficult. (Example – world situations)

This gospel is not new. But our love is still, many times, incomplete. Let us allow Jesus to touch our hearts today so that we may love completely, like him.