



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, Jesus summarizes for us the whole of the law and the prophets (the Old Testament covenant) – **love!** It's all about love of God:

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. (Matthew 22:37)

This is the greatest commandment! We are to love God with all that we are! How often do we put other things in front of God? How often do we rue “having to go to Church”? Do we say our prayers “like good Catholics,” but anticipate with great expectation the moment when we will be done with our Rosary or our spiritual reading, our meditation or our intercessions? In doing this, we are looking at God as a taskmaster and not as a loving Father. The Lord is inviting us into a deeper *loving relationship* with Him, so that we *look forward* to our time with Him, longing to be with Him... because we love Him more than anyone or anything else.

After giving the first commandment, Jesus continues by sharing the second commandment:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

He tells us that this second commandment is like the first. They are connected. By our love for God, we are to love our neighbor.

When I was growing up, I would sometimes get into fights with my sister (I know... you find that impossible to believe!). One time, as we were arguing, my mother told us to stop. So we did. Until my sister got just one more verbal spar in. I reacted in kind. My mother told us to stop (again), and then my sister got just one more in. As I was ready to respond, my mother looked at me and told me to stop. I complained to her, “How come I have to stop?! Jen kept arguing.” My mother then said something I will never forget, **“It hurts me when you fight with your sister.”**

At the time I didn’t understand that sentiment. I think I have a better idea about it now. This is how God is with us. He loves each of us so tenderly, so intimately, so passionately. He is *Father*, and He loves us so much. It hurts Him when He sees us hurting each other. He longs to have all of His children love each other. We love God by loving each other. This is why unforgiveness is such an offense against the Heart of God – He wants His Family to be One Family. When we die, if we get to Heaven, it means that we will *love everyone*. Because love must be free, we must be *willing* to love each person – even the ones who have hurt us. (Please note that loving another doesn’t mean we let them harm us – that would not be loving them, for it would be harming their souls to harm us.)

I remember one homily from my time in the Seminary about this passage. The deacon concluded by saying, **“The amount that we love the person we like the least is the amount that we love God.”**

As we are faced with the command of God to love, let’s examine ourselves and how we love. What are the ways that we need to grow in love of God? What are the areas in which we love other things or people more than God? What are the ways I need to grow in love of neighbor? How do I love myself more than my neighbor? After we’ve seen these areas of brokenness and weakness, let us turn to the God of Mercy and pray for His grace to love more like Him.