

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

God is Our First Love

2 Kings 4:8-11,14-16a; Psalm 89:2-3,16-17,18-19; Romans 6:3-4,8-11; Matthew 10:37-42

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Because God loves us first and eternally, we offer perpetual gratitude to our God,
"Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord!" (cf. Psalm 89).

Our parish patron, St. Theresa of Lisieux, sings the goodness of the Lord through her little ways of doing things with great love. For example, did you know that she asked to be alone at night two days before she died? Despite her request, the assigned sister came to check on her and found her clasping her hands, her eyes raised to heaven. The sister interrupted her: "What are you doing? You should try to sleep." St. Therese replied, "I cannot, dear sister; I suffer too much, and then I pray." The sister asked curiously, "And what do you say to Jesus?" Therese responded, "I say nothing; I love Him!" (cf. *Story of a Soul*, Chapter XII).

Today, our Lord Jesús speaks about love, an essential condition of discipleship. He says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; whoever does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:37-39). These are challenging demands.

Our Lord Jesus wants his disciples to walk in his love, not merely talk about it. He does not ask us to love our family less; rather, he challenges us to cast our love wholeheartedly toward God and choose Him first. When we choose to love God first, we open ourselves to his transforming grace — a love that heals and helps us let go of anything that is hurting our lives and the lives of others, allowing God's love to be love. In this way, we can truly love others and even ourselves only if we allow ourselves to be emptied of self-love and filled with God's love.

In the same way, the disciples of Jesus are not only those who dispense love but also those who receive it and hospitality. He said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matt. 10:40). The disciples must rely on others' hospitality for daily necessities during their mission. Service rendered to them is service to Jesus himself. This implies welcoming help from others. He who does not welcome help from others does not know how to help others. Likewise, a person who is incapable of receiving love is equally incapable of giving it. The love of God, freely received, and the love willingly shared will help us grow in response to our Lord's invitation to love.

Furthermore, loving Jesus means taking up one's cross and following him. This is not easy. But Jesus is the reason we carry our crosses. Our memory of his suffering on the cross, with all its ugliness and cruelty, has become a symbol of incredible hope. Countless people have borne the crosses of their lives with serenity because of their faith in Jesus. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul expressed this confidence that if we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him (cf. Rom. 6:8). We don't carry our crosses alone. We take them up by walking close to Jesus, never straying even an inch from him.

Our patron saint, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, finds strength and courage in this love. She desires to continue learning about Jesus' love. In her diary, *Story of a Soul*, she wrote, "Love attracts love, mine rushes forth to you, it would fain fill up the abyss which attracts it, but alas! It is not even one drop of dew lost in the Ocean. To love you as you love me, I must borrow your very love - then only can I find rest" (Chapter XI).

Let Jesus' love and our love for him be the melody in our living and dealings with one another.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor