

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 28, 2025

People want to say that because God loves them, they are assured of eternal life in heaven. I disagree. Jesus disagrees. To be honest, never, not once in the Gospels or anywhere else in Divine Revelation is it stated that the fact of God's love for us guarantees that we will enter into eternal life. The love of God for us, the mercy of God toward us, the goodness of God is the basis of our hope for eternal life. But on its own, it doesn't guarantee that we enter into everlasting happiness.

We've been working our way through the Gospel of St. Luke this whole liturgical year and St. Luke very much wants his reader or his audience to know the infinite love and mercy of God. So many of his parables of Jesus, so much what we hear in Luke is him communicating this fact: That God's love is unconditional, it is unlimited, it is available. But Luke's message is not that the fact that God loves you means that you will automatically go to heaven. No, the fact of God's love demands a response. When we come face to face with that divine love, when we are, we convinced that the love of God, as the Scriptures reveal it is true and real, that elicits from us a response of love – that is how it is supposed to work anyway. Right?

When we're face to face with someone who loves us infinitely, we can't just say, "Well, that's just great! I guess our relationship is really good." You who are married out there know that that's not how it goes. You can't just say, "Well, my spouse loves me and so our marriage is healthy and strong." When you realize that your spouse loves you, that elicits a response to you. You say, "Wow, this person loves me so much that makes me want to love them better, too." And so it is in our relationship as the Church, with the Lord Jesus. We

think of the Church as His bride. But God has that kind of relationship with us to show us His love. He wants to elicit a response of love from us.

And if you look at the Gospels, I mean for the last several Sundays, and we look at Luke, you see I think, that there this communication of the infinite love of God and there's also this other side of the coin, if you want to put it that way, that the Lord wants something from us. As I said last Sunday, it is not that He wants to extract some sort of productivity from us. He doesn't just want to see what we can do with the talents that we have been given. He wants to live our lives as a response to His love. To live our lives as an expression of our love for Him.

And that love needs to be expressed in so many different ways. In today's Gospel we see that the Lord wants us to express that love in our care of those who are in need, those who are suffering, those who are poor, those who are abandoned or rejected. If we love God, we are supposed to care for those brothers and sisters of ours. Our care for them is an expression of the love we have for God. I spoke last Sunday about a stewardship, right? Not just what do we do with the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted to us – what about the grace of Baptism and all the wonderful graces that we have received? Our good stewardship is not just a duty incumbent upon us. It is actually an expression of our love for God when we see how God loves us. I know we can be a steward of these good gifts as an expression of my love for God.

Other things like our own personal prayer life, not just a duty – ‘oh, well, time to sit down and do my prayers today’ – but we pray out of love for God and as an expression of our desires to be a deeper friendship with God and open our hearts more to the outpouring of

His grace. Participation in the life of the parish, building up the life of the parish each in our own way that is part of the light of this church.

Evangelization is another element in our expression that God's love elicits from us. Pope St. Paul VI almost fifty years ago wrote in an encyclical, "That the person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization. It is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the Kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in turn." It is the same dynamic. It just doesn't make sense to receive so much from God and not to have something well up from within us wanting to give back something in love. And not just this little category, this little category, this little category. It is like all the all the dimensions and aspects of our lives - in all of that, we can make it an expression of our love for God in the face of the love God grants which is so pure and strong and powerful, and immeasurable.

You may remember the traditional hymn, "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*" usually sung in Lent. The final stanza of that hymn has these lyrics:

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.

You know, if I possess everything in the world and offer that to God, that would not be enough. God wants me. He wants you. He wants your whole heart. You might say, "God gives us infinite love, and I cannot give infinite love back to God?" He is not demanding that. He doesn't demand perfection; He invites a totality and gift from us. He wants us to go completely to Him; to hold nothing back.

You know, I think there's a danger when we get into this. You might look at other people and say, "Well, gosh, they go to Mass every day. They go to Adoration. They're doing this and that." And you say, "It is all I am able to do is come to Mass on Sunday." So, don't think of that another person say, "Oh, they must be so much holier than I, they must belong to God so much more than I do because they do all of these other things." That is useless thinking. They might inspire you. But the question is, am I, in the circumstances of my life making the return to God that He wants me to give. Am I loving God in all that I can with all my heart and mind and soul and strength with the circumstances that is yours - working full time, raising a family, busy, busy, busy with all kinds of things. Do you love God above all? Are you loving God in the way you should? All of us can admit to the fact that we can do more to love God. We can love God more completely in the way we live. And that's all God wants from us. He wants us to serve Him with love. He's trying to elicit this response of love from us.

A couple of Sundays ago, it was the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, so we didn't hear the Gospel passage from Luke that day, we heard the Gospel of John. But the Gospel of Luke that day had we heard it would have been the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin and the parable of the Prodigal Son. You remember the older son in the Parable. He did his duty; he remained in his father's house. He did everything he was supposed to do, but he resented his father because he had the attitude of a slave for his master. He didn't have the attitude of the love of the son. God doesn't want to have a slavish attitude. He wants us to realize the profundity of His love for us and to love Him with our whole heart in return.

It's so important every day - maybe the first thing in the morning – to reflect on God's love for us. Reflect on the God's infinite mercy, His goodness toward us. Because that sets the course for the rest of the day. When we have love at the beginning of our day, it awakens something in us - this desire to live our day as a response to that love, to live our day as an expression of our love for Him.

We ask God for the grace this day, not only to live in the truth of His love for us but to find it in ourselves in everything we do and say and think, to make ourselves an offering in love to Him holding nothing back of giving Him all.