

LOVING GOD IN LOVING NEIGHBOUR: 30TH SUNDAY A

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A mother in a country town a long way from here became very concerned about the children she saw in the streets of her town. She was convinced that they were wild, unruly and disrespectful. She called them '*ferals*', and to anyone who would listen she would say: '*Parents no longer teach their children to be obedient.*' She made up her mind this would never happen in her family. So she insisted on total and absolute obedience. Either her children did exactly what she told them to do, or they were punished very severely.

For disobeying any of her orders or breaking any of her rules, she stopped them going out to play or going to their friends' homes, sent them to bed without a meal, gave them no pocket money, stopped them from getting or giving Christmas presents, cancelled their birthday parties, refused to let them get a driver's licence when they were old enough, and stopped them going to university. She was a real tyrant.

Her campaign was very successful. Her children were very obedient and respectful. On the outside, that is. On the inside, they were seething. Finally, when they were older, every one of them moved away from their mother as far as possible. As things turned out, they were all very successful in their careers. One day the mother got on the phone to her youngest daughter and complained: '*Why don't any of you love me? Didn't I teach you the discipline you needed to succeed in your work?*' '*Yeah,*' said the young woman, '*but you never loved us.*'

That mother goes to church every Sunday. Every Sunday she receives the risen Jesus in the consecrated bread and wine. Every Sunday she hears the teaching of Jesus. But she completely misses the point of his teaching. His teaching that the most important thing in life is having good, happy, harmonious and peaceful relationships, relationships of love! Having love for God and love for fellow human beings as the two hinges on the door to life!

The need and the requirement to both love God and care for others as much as I care for myself, were already well known in the Jewish community of Jesus. What is new and original with him is his insistence that you cannot have one without the other. What is new and original with him is that the proof, the test, of our love for God is our love for others. What is also new and fresh about the

teaching of Jesus is that obeying any of the laws of God has to be done with love. Love must be the energy that empowers all our efforts to be good people and all our efforts to do good things.

In the teaching of Jesus too, love for neighbour includes every other human being without exception. Wasn't his answer to the question put to him '*who is my neighbour?*' to tell his famous story of the Good Samaritan. And isn't the point of that story that the neighbour God calls me to love is always the person who needs me now? For example, the man up the street who has just lost his wife to cancer; the woman over the road who is old and bedridden but has no family to visit her; the asylum seeker languishing in detention in Maribyrnong with no-one to support his claims for a safe home and a new life for his family; the drought-stricken farmer watching his sheep die one by one, his breeding-stock among them.

Of course we couldn't possibly be ready to love all other persons, were it not for the example of Jesus himself, and for the gift of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit of love. Without Jesus and the Spirit, we couldn't possibly forgive those who have hurt and harmed us. Without Jesus and the Spirit we couldn't possibly reach out to someone we don't like, or to someone who is not part of our comfort zone of family and friends. But with Jesus and his Spirit, we can do good and great things for others, even for complete strangers we have never met before. This is just what was happening during the nightmare of the two Bali bombings that happened over thirteen years ago this month. It brought out the best in those generous people – quite a few - who cared more for the safety of other victims than they cared for themselves.

For that gift of love – generous, unselfish, and wholehearted love for God, and generous, unselfish, and wholehearted love for neighbour - let us come to the table of the Lord today! Let us also pray to the Lord during the rest of our Eucharist together, that day by day every single one of us here will bit by bit become a more loving and a more caring person!

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