

Homily

31 Sunday in OT, November 4, 2018

When I was growing up, we had neighbors on each side of our home. On one side was the high school football coach. He and my dad got along great. So much so, that when I mowed our lawn, my dad asked me to mow his also. I thought to myself, "Come on dad, he's your friend not mine."

On the other side, our neighbor had a very large tree in his back yard. It grew along the fence bordering our two properties. The tree's branches stretched over into our yard and often dropped leaves and branches onto our lawn. My dad threatened to cut off the branches that hovered across to our side of the fence. Our neighbor didn't like that. That wasn't the only thing that my dad and our neighbor disagreed about.

We are blest to have a very friendly, even jovial, pastor in Fr. Michael. As many of you know, he also likes to play practical jokes. He often has fun with the servers before mass, telling those holding the candles not to light on fire the hair of the person in front of them in the procession, or acting like (and sometimes actually) blowing out their candles.

One Mass, oh, a year ago or more, just as Fr. Michael and I sat down for the first reading, he leans over to me and asks me if my alb is inside out. I immediately said, "No." Then, for the rest of Mass, I was struggling with the thought that my alb was possibly inside out. By the end of Mass, I was convinced my alb was inside out. After Mass, as I was removing my vestments, I realized my alb was not inside out.

With friends like these, who needs enemies.

Jesus today reminds us of what we heard from Moses, that we *"shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,*

with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

He further instructs us that, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Neighbor. Jesus doesn't distinguish between those neighbors we get along with and those we don't. Friend or enemy, best friend or just an acquaintance, man or woman, citizen or alien, child or our elder, all people are our neighbor.

And we have to love them. That is God's command.

Jesus tells the scribe the command to love your neighbor is the second greatest commandment, second only to loving God.

I have some news for you, but you already know this. God made each of us in His image and likeness. When we see our neighbor, we see God.

In Matthew, Jesus tells us, *“What you do to the least of your brother, you do to me.”*

This means we are the same; we are one, together as the Body of Christ and one with Him as our Bridegroom. When we are angry with our neighbor, we are angry with Christ; we are inseparable. When we love our neighbor, we love Christ.

Now this is where my head starts to spin; when I am angry with myself, I am angry with God. I cannot love God when I don't love myself.

But here is where I need to take a hard look at myself. It's good to be disappointed with my sinful actions; we all make mistakes. But it is not good to hate myself. God only makes good things.

The earth, the heavens, the land and the oceans, the plants and animals, and us. He made us good.

It was through the most necessary sin of Adam that we fell. We are still good, we are just separated from God because of our sinful actions.

The whole of salvation history is full of examples of how God continues to reach out to us, to reconcile us to Him, and how we continue to fall, get back up, reconcile to God and continue towards what is right and good.

We do this by staying focused on Jesus. When Jesus called Peter out of the boat and onto the water, Peter walked on water as long as he was focused on Jesus. When he took his eyes off Jesus and looked around at his surroundings, he sank, he fell into the water.

When the sinful woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried His feet with her hair, the Pharisee only saw the sinner. Jesus asked the Pharisee, *“Do you see this woman?”*

When we look at our neighbor, do we see the person, the creation of God made in His image and likeness? Or do we, like the Pharisee, see the sin.

It is difficult to separate the sin from the sinner. But that is what love does, it allows us to see the beauty in God's creation, in our brother and sister, in our neighbor. It doesn't negate the sin; we hate sin, we strive to avoid sin, and we are called to do good.

We do good when we love our neighbor by being kind and forgiving the sin.

That's what Jesus did and does for us today; he forgives sins. He forgave the sin of Peter when Peter denied Him three times. He forgave the sin of the sinful woman at the Pharisee's home. He commanded us to forgive the sins of our brother not seven but seventy-seven times.

Everyday we are aware of our sinfulness. And everyday we are aware of the sins of those around us. *“...forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”*

Jesus has already paid the price; we are all forgiven. We just need to embrace God's mercy, ask forgiveness, forgive others and love one another and ourselves. Because we show our love for God when we love each other.

Love one another. It's the right thing to do.