

Homily
Memorial of Saint Louis of France (St. Louis IX)
Friday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time
August 25, 2023

Early in my faith journey as an adult, I foolishly shared my assertion about the Holy Bible. A friend and I were in conversation about our faith, spirituality and beliefs. I affirmed that the Bible could be summed up in one word. He objected. But before he could explain, I blurted out, “Love.” He acquiesced, chuckled and said, “Yes, but...” I don’t remember what he said after that because I was so proud of myself for ‘winning’ that argument. I didn’t realize at that time how right I was, although I couldn’t have fairly supported my statement.

Today, Jesus gives us the Greatest Commandment, to love God and love one another. Sounds simple, but not easy. Everything beyond this ‘simple’ command appears to be much harder.

Who is familiar with the fundamentals of basketball? I remember a story about an NBA coach who was frustrated with his team; they were making rookie mistakes and losing games. At the next practice, instead of the usual drills and staged plays, he had them dribble the basketball up and down the court for an hour. Then he had them pair up and pass the ball back and forth for an hour. Then he had them line up and shoot from different positions around the court for an hour, short shots that a freshman high schooler would find easy.

In each of these drills, the coach pushed the motto, ‘focus on the basics and the rest will come.’ It’s the same in all sports, and in nearly every aspect of our lives; focus on the basics and the rest will come.

In movies and television, I often hear the phrase, ‘it’s complicated,’ when someone finds it hard to explain their actions or the situation they find themselves in. When I hear this, I get frustrated because it usually comes down to simply communicating with another.

When I’m frustrated with my own situations, I often fall into that same excuse, ‘it’s complicated.’ I often forget the basics, “Love God, love one another.” The apostle Paul further gives us some basics, “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Paul explains in praying without ceasing to rejoice, give thanks and pray for one another. This is the formula for our prayer. When we start with love, the rest will come. When we love God, we want to do what He wants, to align our Will to His. When we love one another, we want what is best for our brothers and sisters, so we pray for them.

Today we remember St Louis of France, also known as King Louis IX. He was known as a staunch defender of the faith, earning him the unofficial moniker, “The Monk King.” His father, King Louis VIII, died when he was only 12. His mother ran the country until he was of age. She is reputed to have said, “I love you, my dear son, as much as a mother can love her child; but I would rather see you dead at my feet than that you should ever commit a mortal sin.”

He was known for a faithful prayer life. Because of his wisdom in fair judgements, he was often sought outside his own country for mediation of disputes. He loved his country and fought hard for strict but fair enforcement of Catholic orthodoxy. Louis is the only monarch of France to be canonized.

When I find myself in those situations where things seem complicated, I need to remember to go back to the basics. It all begins with love.