

Homily
Memorial of Saint Rose of Lima, Virgin
August 23, 2024

Today's Gospel reminds us of how we need to put God first. Finding God is like finding a treasure, for which we sell all we have to buy. Every day, we have the opportunity to learn more about God and our relationship with God. As we learn more, as we find more, we dig deeper to more fully understand just Who God is and what God wants of us. As we heard in Wednesday's Gospel from John, "Simon, son of John, do you love me *more than these?*" (emphasis mine) Peter responds to Jesus, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus then instructs Peter, "Feed my lambs." John 21:15b,d,f

Putting God first before all others means we must then put our neighbor first. Loving God fully and completely, beyond all others, requires we love all others. This seems to be the pinnacle of contradictions. Yet, it isn't. In our Catholic faith, the "Yes, And," approach applies to most things, and especially to this thing. Yes, we must "love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Mt 22:37b And we must then, not before, love our neighbor as ourself. It is the 'Yes, And', the 'One-Two Punch' of our faith that seems to be so obvious and easy, yet so difficult and complicated. "Yes, I love God, and yes, I love my neighbor, but..." It is the 'but' that gets us in trouble.

So often we find the excuse we need to avoid loving our neighbor, whether it's something they did that warrants our judgement or something we need that supersedes that command to love our neighbor. Maybe that person did an unkind thing to someone else, or me. Or I really need to focus on myself right now, putting on the back burner the help I was intending to offer my neighbor.

St. Rose of Lima seems to have modeled Catherine of Siena, which garnered ridicule from friends and even her parents. Her great love for God was so intense that others thought it a hinderance to a rational life. She was born Isabel Flores de Olivia, but because of her physical beauty, she was nicknamed Rose, which stuck for life. She wanted to become a nun from her early childhood. She secretly practiced her faith, in prayer, mortification, adoration and Mass. She wanted to embrace chastity, which conflicted with her parents' wishes for her to be married. They compromised: Rose lived in a room in her parents' home in solitude. She was finally permitted to join the Third Order of St. Dominic at age twenty. She continued her life of prayer and penance until her death at age 31. She is the patroness of embroiderers, gardeners, florists, those who suffer ridicule for their piety, and people who suffer family problems. She is a loving example of loving God before all others, and in turn loving others for God, even if those others didn't seem worthy of her love.

When we love God first, we must remember that others may not understand, love God anyway. When we love others as God wants us to love others, we must remember that sometimes others may not seem worthy of that love, love others anyway. When we fail, and we will fail, and when we don't feel worthy of loving ourselves as God commands, we must love ourselves anyway. God loves us anyway because He can't help it. God is Love.