

November 4, 2018

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

**"You shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, with all your soul,  
and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself."**

*Sometimes I just like to sit there and let you love me,  
and sometimes I just like to sit there and love you.*

The word, Love appears in bible 348 times. Must be important. We know that it's about more than affection; it's about seeing everyone on earth as family. We are all in need of healing, we are all a cry for help, we all save each other because we belong to each other.

Nothing softens and saves the heart like a personal encounter. The Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995), said the only thing that really converts people is "the face of the other." He said when we receive and empathize with the face of the other (especially the suffering face), it leads to transformation of our whole being. Faces delighting in us mirror the face of God to us, giving us the face we can't give to ourselves.

The early mirroring of God we receive from our parents is particularly important. Neuroscience now shows that the gaze between a newborn and his or her loving caretaker creates "mirror neurons" that help a person become compassionate and have empathy for others. When a child is eased out of God's heart from the mother's womb, the place that is most like paradise is the mother's gaze. Looking into the eyes of her infant, the mother reveals God's infinite gaze of love. And when the infant looks into her eyes, it is looking into God's eyes.

When caregivers and infants gaze at each other, their brain activity increases, parts of their brains literally light up. When it does not receive that initial intimacy, there will remain in its soul for the rest of its life a deprivation that will be hard for it to fill. When God gazes at us and we gaze at God, we both light up. It is a time of fulness, of being in kinship with each other inside God.

God is continually gazing on us. When we gaze at each other, our brain activity increases and we light up. Listen to what Jesus says to us in the Gospel of John:

† *As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.*

† *If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.*

† *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*

† *This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.*

† *No one has greater love than this, <sup>j</sup> to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

† *You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

† *I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.*

† *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.*

† *This I command you: love one another as I have loved you.*

Jesus can't say it enough. Neither can we. What is perhaps the favorite theme of all poetry and music - I love you!

We can see what happens when we don't receive that gaze of caring. We cease asking each other, "*What do you need? How can I help you?*" and find ourselves saying instead, "*Here's what your problem is, here's how you fix it. Don't you know the difference between right and wrong!*" Loving and caring about each other ushers in the Kinship of God; indifference impedes our entrance into it.

13th century Rumi writes in his poem to God, "*You are in every kindness.*"

Franciscan Richard Rohr tells us that we are programmed and wired for union, so when we feel separated from the rest, we are on the wrong track and living in what Albert Einstein called, an optical delusion, a prison. Receiving the gaze of caring frees us from that prison.

Ann Lamott says, "*We are - all of us - looking for a home for our hearts, seeing everyone on earth as family. We are all in need of healing, we are all a cry for help, we all save each other because we belong to each other. And this is how God intends it.*"

Concern for others isn't just for those who comfort us, it's also for those who inconvenience us and threaten us, including family, friends, and even our church and political leaders. Healing is just one gaze away: "*Love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and our neighbor as ourselves?*"

Caring about each other isn't just a nice "Christian" thing to do, it's something we do as if our lives depended on it.

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