

Homily: Oct 31, 2021

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Today we celebrate our most basic Christian vocation: to love God and one another with our whole being. At the same time we must admit that as human beings, we never love completely. So we call upon our all compassionate God for mercy.

We might want to ask Jesus, “Why did you tell the scribe, who understood the first commandment so well, ‘you are not far from the kingdom of God?’” There can be three reasons why Jesus told the wise scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God:

1—Understanding the law of loving God and neighbor is only the first step. The second and most important step is to love concretely—to bring love from the head into action.

2—The second reason Jesus said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” is that as human beings we are unable to love God or love neighbor perfectly. We can only try to love God with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, ALL our mind and ALL our strength—as much as possible.

3—The third reason Jesus told the scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” is that “love your neighbor as yourself” really means to love another person as if that person were another you. However, as human beings we can’t love others perfectly, because we can’t even love ourselves perfectly or fully. We don’t love ourselves as God loves us. Yet, imperfect as we human beings are, God loves us totally.

So Jesus’ statement to the scribe is true. “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And that scribe represents each one of us, especially, if we understand and agree that there is only one God, whom we are to love with our whole being. I am like that wise scribe, too, if I understand and agree that I must love other people as if they were another I.

So, how do we come closer and closer to the kingdom of God? We come closer to making our world the kingdom of God when we love God as wholeheartedly as possible by loving our neighbor as wholeheartedly as possible, too, through our words, thoughts and actions. We come closer to the kingdom of God especially when we love those people who are difficult for us to love. The difficult people to love may be in our family or in our school or work place. They may be the homeless persons in our parks and on our streets. They may be people very different than us in color, race, religion and education. They may be people who offended us.

One of the most graphic yet real stories about loving others, no matter how difficult, is about an elderly mother in Beirut, Lebanon. I heard this story directly from her Jesuit pastor, helping at a retreat center in Toronto, Canada in 1984. He told us how Christians and Muslims were at war with one another in the late 1970s. One day, a group of Catholic youth spotted a Muslim youth who had helped in killing a Catholic youth.

They caught him and dragged him to the front steps of the home of the Catholic youth. They called Catholic youth's mother to come out. They told her, "Mama, this is one of the guys who killed your son. So we are going to kill him as retaliation for your son's death." She screamed out, "Do not kill him! He, too, is my son!" This mother could see and love that young murderer as her own.

No matter how difficult it may be to love our neighbor, Jesus invites us to love our neighbors as ourselves and love God with our whole being—as much as possible. Then we come nearer to the kingdom of God. Though our love is imperfect, our world becomes ever more like the kingdom of God because God's boundless love and mercy are assisting as well.