

Homily Outline for the 30th Sunday of the Year - Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
October 29, 2023

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- I. Yesterday was an historic and memorable day as over 5,000 people gathered at the Bank of Springfield Convention Center for our Diocesan Eucharistic Congress and the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
 - A. Our diocesan celebration was our local participation in the National Eucharistic Revival called for by the Catholic Bishops of the United States
 - B. You may be wondering: what is a revival?
 1. Revival literally means to bring something back to life. An Emergency Room doctor might revive someone whose heart has stopped. A spiritual revival is to bring back to life a faith that has become dormant or deadened.
 2. Thus, our Eucharistic Revival has a two-fold purpose. First, our Eucharistic Revival seeks to bring back to life the faith of those who have wavered in our Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist as His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. Second, our Eucharistic Revival seeks to bring back to a living practice of the faith those who have stopped coming to church, not only during the COVID shutdowns, but even before that.
 - C. At our Convocation of Priests last month, we were asked to recall a time when we experienced the love of our Eucharistic Lord. I immediately thought of my First Holy Communion, which I received 61 years ago, on May 6, 1962, when I was in Fourth Grade.

1. At that point, I was almost ten years old, so receiving my First Holy Communion was something I had time to think about and look forward to with great anticipation. I was not disappointed.
 2. Receiving my First Holy Communion was a profound moment of experiencing the love of Christ coming into my heart, and I continue to cherish that awareness of divine presence within me every time I receive Holy Communion.
- D. If your experience of receiving Holy Communion has grown tepid and you wish to revive its power to move you spiritually, may I suggest that you think back to your own First Holy Communion, which I hope was also a profoundly moving spiritual experience for yourself.
- II. In our first reading today from the Book of Exodus (Exodus 22:20–26), the context is that the tribes of Israel had already become covenant partners with God at Sinai. As with any such agreement, there are expectations demanded of both parties. Already the chosen people have seen for themselves how committed God is to the covenant; God has delivered them from oppression in Egypt and protected them all along the way to Sinai. Now it is time for God, through the agency of his servant Moses, to explain what kind of commitment is expected of the people of Israel. The precise details of this code of conduct make it perfectly clear what they must do to remain a faithful partner in this covenant: they must show compassion and generosity for poor and helpless people, such as aliens, widows, and orphans.
- III. In today's Gospel passage from Saint Matthew (Matthew 22:34–40), a scribe asks Jesus which commandment of the law is the greatest. In and of itself, this would not have been a bad inquiry. The rabbis often discussed among themselves this very question. However, their motive was to gain a deeper understanding of the Torah – not to test one another.

- A. Jesus answers the scholar of the law as would almost every faithful Jew. He quotes the famous text from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 that begins: "Hear O Israel. The Lord is our God the Lord alone."
 - B. More detail is supplied as Jesus continues, "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." Many rabbis would agree that all the commandments were equally great and needed to be kept with equal vigor. Still, the question about the greatest continued to be discussed.
 - C. The Pharisee asked only about the greatest commandment. Jesus addresses that question but then continues on to present a second commandment, which he says is like the first. This second commandment comes from Leviticus 19:29: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus then proclaims that these two commandments summarize the whole law and the prophets. The phrase "law and prophets" refers to the fulness of divine revelation. We are reminded what Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount: "Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (5:17).
- IV. Jesus places love of neighbor side by side with the love of God.
- A. Benjamin Disraeli, the British statesman, politician, and writer who twice served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in the 19th Century, once said, "Christianity teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves; modern society acknowledges no neighbor."
 - B. C.S. Lewis, the 20th Century British writer, literary scholar, and lay theologian said, "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor. Act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him."
 - C. Sometimes it is challenging to love a difficult or annoying person. St. Catherine of Siena said, "Love your neighbor with at least your prayers and goodwill if you have nothing else."

- D. Love is first and foremost about commitment to the well-being of others. It must be a conscious, every-single-day decision: to love or not to love. Love can have little to do with affection or feelings. It is not necessarily about “liking” someone. Love is a verb, an action.
- V. Was there ever a greater act of love than Jesus offering his very self for the love of the world? Let us commemorate this once again as we approach the altar of the Eucharist, obeying his mandate, “Do this in memory of me.” For no greater command of the Lord has been better or more rightly kept than this one.
- VI. May God give us this grace. Amen.