

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A - 2017)

In our holy gospel today, Jesus says that the greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.

I would like to say a few more words about this commandment today, and that's because it's the key to becoming a saint.

Now lots of people have goals ... I'm going to get my diploma. I'm going to climb a mountain. I'm going to see Europe. I'm going to lose weight. I'm going to learn how to play the tuba. I'm going to be a major league hockey player.

However, not too many people want to become saints. At least that's not the first thing they think about when asked what they want to do with their lives. When you ask children what they want to be when they grow up, not too many say, "I'm going to be a saint."

When you ask teens what they are going to do when they graduate, most say things like "I want to get a good job and make a decent living and maybe get married and have some kids." I have yet to hear anyone say, "I want to become a saint." That's also true for older folks as well.

Yet, every single one of us should have that as our goal. Every single one of us should consciously and intentionally have as our goal and desire to become a saint before we die.

Why? Because in heaven, there are no sinners. There are only saints. So, if you die a sinner, if you die in a state of mortal sin, you cannot go to heaven.

So why not? Why can't sinners go to heaven? Well, the answer is simple. They don't love God above all things. They don't love God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength.

In fact, more than a few people love other things more than God. Some love wealth more than God. Some love power more than God. Some love porn more than God. Some love fame more than God. Some love drugs more than God. Some love sports more than God.

So the question is not "Why can't they go to heaven?" but rather, "How could they ever be happy in heaven?" Even if God said to them, come and join me, they would always be longing for that thing they loved more than God.

No doubt we've all been to some event we didn't want to go to. A boring business seminar, some class about a subject you're not interested in, a gathering with relatives or neighbors you don't care for. When we've had to go to those things, most of us can't wait for them to be over. We can't wait to get out the door and get back to doing what we want to do. Well, going to heaven if you don't love God would be like that.

Imagine someone who doesn't love God above all things. Imagine someone who cares more about the things God has created than about God Himself. Suppose God said to that person, "Come on in, come on and join me and the angels and saints in heaven." How long do you suppose it would take before they were looking at their cell phone to see who just texted them? How long before they were saying, "Well, it's been nice, but I have to get going."

Furthermore, think about this. Suppose when that individual said, "So God, it's been nice but I have to get going" suppose then that God said, "You can't go. You have to stay with me forever." What do you think would happen then?

We all know what would happen. That person would get angry. In fact, they would become enraged and would be filled with hatred for God. They would be just like children who say to their parents, "I hate you" when their parents won't let them have what they want. These folks would hate God because God wouldn't let them have what they loved the most.

So let's come back to loving God. What does that have to do with becoming a saint? The answer is simple. Saints are just people who love God with all their heart and soul and mind. Saints are people who want to be with God in heaven more than anything else.

Sinners on the other hand are not saints. Sinners love something else or someone else more than God. Sinners don't want to go to heaven, or at least they aren't sure they want to go there. They are like people who get up in the morning and think, should I get up and get dressed and do something productive or should I just lay around all day and play video games?

People who love God with all their heart and soul and mind naturally want to be with God. They want to go to heaven, and so, they also are working on becoming saints every day.

Now there are many holy people in this world. There are already many saints, and some are right here in this parish. In fact, saints can be found everywhere. Saints are men and women. Saints are young and old. Saints are white and black and red and brown and yellow. Saints also come from every walk of life. Some are single and others are married. Some were soldiers and others farmers or laborers or merchants. Some are sisters or priests or bishops.

The point here is this: We must all be working on becoming saints, we must all be working on loving God with all of our heart and soul and mind if we want to go to heaven. Now to help us become saints, the Church holds up for us examples of great saints, and it does that in several ways.

First, by canonizing saints. So, when someone has lead a very holy life, the Church may study his or her life, and if that person has been found to be saintly in this life, and if through their intercession, miracles have been worked, the Church may declare that person to be a saint.

Second, the Church establishes feast days on which we honor the saints. So, each year, we are reminded of their holy lives and as we think about what they did for God, we are inspired to follow their example.

Third, each year on November 1st, we celebrate the feast of all saints, that is, those who don't have their own particular feast day. On that day, we honor all the saints by going to Mass. The Solemnity of All Saints also serves to remind us, that some day, when God calls us from this life, we too hope to be numbered among the blessed.

Let me conclude today by giving you brief sketches of four saints that our youth are honoring in particular this year. They are Saint Joseph, Saint Juan Diego, Saint Theresa of Lisieux and Saint Gemma.

Saint Joseph was the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is mentioned in the gospels of Saints Luke and Matthew, but none of his spoken words are recorded there.

Saint Joseph was a carpenter who worked to support his family. He was obedient to the will of God and when informed by angels of God's will, he immediately set about doing it. Saint Joseph was humble as evidenced by his apprehensions about taking Mary as his wife. He feared doing so because of her great holiness. Saint Joseph was also courageous. When the Christ Child was in danger from King Herod, Saint Joseph left the land he knew and took the holy family to Egypt where they would be safe. For these reasons, Saint Joseph is honored as patron of the universal Church and of those who work in the trades and of all fathers.

Saint Juan Diego was an Indian who lived in Mexico. He too was a good and humble man. He died in 1548. Seventeen years earlier, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and asked him to go to the bishop and tell the bishop that she wanted a church built on the spot where she has appeared. Later on, this became the great shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mary referred to Saint Juan as her dear son and wanted him to make known to all the people of Mexico and the Americas that God loved them and that she was their mother and that Jesus died for them. Saint Juan lived the rest of his life serving our Lord by fulfilling these requests.

Saint Theresa of Lisieux was French. She died in 1897 at the young age of 24. However, during her short life, she became one of the Church's greatest and most powerful saints. She taught that everything we do, if offered to God, is a means of sanctification. Doing our daily duties with love is very pleasing to God and will make us great saints.

Saint Gemma was Italian, and she also died young. She was only 25 when she died in 1903. Saint Gemma was granted many graces by God. Her guardian angel often appeared to her. Later in life, she was to mystically share in the suffering of Jesus.

These saints make it clear that we can all become saints. In fact we must if we want to get to heaven. Each of us should all have as our goal to become a saint, and to do so requires one thing: we must love God with all our heart, soul and mind.

So then, let us do just that. Let us all make up our minds to become as holy as God wants us to be. Let us reflect on what we love the most in life and make sure that is God. Let us keep the great commandments to love so that we might live with God forever. Amen.