

In reflecting on today's Gospel, I couldn't help but think of an overarching question that so wonderfully explains the Lord's words: *what is the meaning of life?* We in the Catholic Church would joyfully respond to this perennial human question with one word: *love*. One could say that we were freely created *out of love, to be loved, and to love*. St. John Paul II wrote that "love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." Indeed, our human vocation is to freely love God *and* others, while allowing ourselves *to be loved* by God and others.

As our Savior tells us in the Gospel today, love of God *and neighbor* is the beating heart of our faith. In fact, the "*whole law and the prophets*" are summed up by these two commandments to love God *and* neighbor. So contrary to popular stereotypes, our Catholic faith is *not* about burdensome rules and oppressive regulations—our faith is not defined by some obsessive and irrational legalism.

No, given that *love is the ultimate meaning of life*, it's also the essence of our Catholic faith. And if our Catholic faith is all about love, *then it's all about relationship*—relationship *first and foremost with*

*God and then* our neighbor. To be Catholic means to enjoy an intimate, personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ *in and through* His Church. This entails that we as disciples are called to love Christ with every fiber of our being *and to love all people as He loves them*. Love of God and love of neighbor are *absolutely inseparable!*

Brothers and sisters, if we don't understand our Catholic faith in the context of *relationship*—in the context of *love*: love for God *and* neighbor—then our faith becomes *totally meaningless*. Now since love is at the heart of our Catholic faith, then the next logical question is, “what is love”? For disciples of Christ, true love is *not some* “superficial feeling,” but rather a *stable disposition of the will*—where one freely seeks the *authentic good* of another *purely for the sake of the other*. Love is the selfless recognition of the other and their intrinsic dignity, value, and worth. Therefore love is *totally devoid* of selfishness.

And literally the “Good News” is that “love” is not some “*abstract fairy-tale*,” but rather *a Person!* “Love” was sent into this world as our Savior—*Love has a face!* Love became incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, Who came to free us from sin and

death! *As Love incarnate, Jesus is the meaning of life* and by His own example, He teaches us how to love and be loved. If you want a visual definition of love, simply look to any crucifix—because it's on the cross that our Savior teaches us the true meaning of love. Love is selfless, it is pure, it is sacrificial, it is humble, it is merciful, it is truthful, it is total self-gift for the good of another. The crucifix reminds us that there can be *no love without sacrifice. Love requires sacrifice!* Love requires heroism; and there's *nothing more heroic than self-sacrificing love.*

If love is defined as selflessly seeking the authentic good of another, then how can we practically love God, as Jesus teaches us in the Gospel? What does it even mean to love God? Well thankfully, God Himself, answers this important question for us repeatedly in the New Testament. For example, in 1 John 5:3, the Lord reveals to us, *“For the love of God is this, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”*

So brothers and sisters, loving God means keeping His Commandments, which include all of the fundamental moral teachings of His Church. But how we can love God and keep His commandments,

if we first don't know His commandments and what they practically mean for our lives? Therefore in our desire to love God and neighbor we need a good and comprehensive examination of conscience, based on the teachings of Christ and His Church, to help us to know *how* to love God and neighbor—to know right from wrong and good from evil. If you don't have a good examination of conscience or if you don't know where to find one, please contact me at the rectory and I will give you one. As a priest, it's my sacred duty to help form your conscience *precisely* so that you know how to love God and neighbor as Jesus commands us in today's Gospel.

So brothers and sisters, as we prepare to encounter our merciful Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist—our Savior Who loves us so much, let's ask Him for the grace to *love Him in return* with every fiber of our being—to love Him by loving our neighbor—because love is the meaning of our lives and it's the essence of our Catholic faith.