

## ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

*Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that Jesus had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-31).*

How many of you remember the early Beatles song "All You Need Is Love" (Lennon & McCartney 1967)? I always considered this song a protest song against the unjust political systems at the time. The song starts off as an innocent lament with; *"There's nothing you can do that can't be done,"* then builds up to a crescendo that's meant to arouse the listener into acting against the world system by boldly proclaiming, "love is all you need." Many students in the late nineteen sixties, who were inspired by this song, protested in the streets and were harmed (some even killed) by Police and the Military which only enraged others to protest even more. When removing all political innuendoes and examining these lyrics there is some truth in what is being expressed - *all you need is love, and love is all you need!* The writer implies that, 'with love' nothing is impossible, and again, this is what 1 Corinthians 13:8 declares, **"Love never fails."**

Pope Benedict XV1 believes that the most fundamental calling of every Christian is that of **love**. First to love God and Christ, but then to love our fellow human beings. If we are to make God visible to those people around us, we must exercise love and assistance to all those in need.

Pope Benedict XVI extends this invitation, *“Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. So experience love, and in this way cause the light of God to enter into the world.”* In this, his first letter to all his bishops, priests and deacons (which was given to me by a friend), entitled “God is Love,” part two is about the practice of love by the church as a “community of love.” Much of that’s written in this letter is very challenging - not just to the Catholic Church but to the body of Christ as a whole. But what really challenged me is the need to build a Community of Love.

So much of our present-day teaching concerning ‘the need to love’ is focused entirely on the first part of the double commandment Jesus gave us (as mentioned in our opening passage). ***“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’”*** I must admit that I’ve seldom heard a sermon on loving your neighbour as yourself, in the context of building a community. Yet, as we examine scripture, it becomes blatantly obvious that the one cannot exist without the other. You cannot say you love God and dislike your neighbour. 1 John 4:20 says, ***“If someone says, ‘I love God’, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”***

The question you may be asking yourself is this, “Can I love God without seeing Him?” True, no one has ever seen God and yet God is not totally invisible to us. God loved us first so that His love may appear to us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has become visible in as much as He, *“has sent His Son into the world, so that we might live through Him”* (1 John 4:9). Indeed God is clearly visible to us through His Son and in the love-story recounted by the Bible where God is seen as moving toward us.

He seeks to first win our hearts - nothing else! From the miraculous birth, to the cross and the resurrection, God has revealed Himself. That being so, wherever we may turn we come face-to-face with Love personified. Therefore, the answer to your question, "Can I love God without seeing Him?" Is simply, "Yes." Hence, if this be true, and you can *love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*, then likewise, you can *love your neighbour as yourself*. The love of God and the love of neighbour are inseparable, they form two parts of a single commandment. However, both are derived from the love of God - who has loved us first.

No longer is loving God and loving our neighbour in question! No longer do we have a commandment that is imposed on us calling for the impossible. Rather, of a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must be shared with others. Notice that love grows through love and because it comes from God and joins us to Him it brings about a unity that transcends our human limitations. We are able to love those people whom we do not like or even know! Yet, this can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God. Our will and God's will must become one, thus effecting our feelings. This way we can learn to look at people not simply through eyes and feelings, but through the eyes and perspective of Jesus Christ. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, we will be able to give to others much more than their outward necessities; we will be able to give them the "look of love" which they crave.

It is interesting that the Greek word used in Luke 12:31 for "neighbour" literally means "the one that's near." There are two other words that Luke could have used but he chose this one. It tells me that we are to love all those people we come into contact with; whether we like them, know them, or not! The only way to build a Community of Love is to do it this way.

For the first time I have come to realise the importance of this double command in the context of building a community. We can love ourselves and each other as much as we like, but until we can love all those we come into contact with the same way, the church is not fulfilling its primary role. The “look of love” is probably the most unused gift in the church! Nevertheless, it’s what people are yearning for. They all want to belong to something and a Community of Love is irresistible. This kind of love is a witness to the world that God is alive and that He cares for them. Note, the Father wishes to make all of humanity a single family in His Son. The entire activity of the church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of every man, woman and child. In other words, God wants everyone to benefit from the saving and cleansing work of the cross.

Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each of us. However, to be truly effective in a community it must be organised. A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the office of deacon (Acts 6:5-6). In the early church the Apostles had been entrusted primarily with prayer and the ministry of the word. However, they were feeling overburdened by “serving tables,” so they decided to reserve to themselves the principle duty and designate the other task to seven people. This new group wasn’t put together to carry out the work of distributing food and clothing to the needs of the people in a mechanical fashion. No, they were to be men **“full of the Spirit and of wisdom”** (Acts 6:1-6). In other words, this social service was absolutely concrete and reliable, yet at the same time, there was also a “spiritual” service necessary for the wellbeing of the community. There was truly a spiritual office which carried out a vital responsibility of the church, namely a well-organised and well-ordered love of neighbour!

If we are to effect the surrounding community, we too must provide this necessary service. We must be organised in the way we allow the love of God touch hearts. We must be organised in the way we reach out to meet people's needs. We must be organised in the how we satisfy the longing for belonging. Yes, we must be organised in demonstrating and releasing the love of God into every situation. If love never fails, we must treat it with the respect it deserves, and especially when it concerns other people. There are people out there that are waiting for you to connect with them, they are waiting for the "look of love" that will melt their hearts and draw them to Christ. Let them see Jesus in your eyes and they will never be the same again - I assure you!