

Fr. John's Homily for October 29, 2023, the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Love God and Love Neighbor.

JMJ CHS

Love, love, love, love, luuuuuve. There in Matthew's Gospel reading we have the two greatest commandments. The first: Love God with your *whole heart, mind, and soul*. But two other Gospels from Mark and Luke even add "*all your strength*". That's a pretty tall order. And then, of course, we also have *Love your neighbor as yourself*. That's not very easy either.

And so, the theme of today's homily will necessarily be.....Love.

Now one of the great symbols of love is the oil can. Right? (I have one right here.) Well, it is not really a symbol of love, but, I will shortly tell you how it became a symbol of love, at least to one man and a number of his friends.

But what are some of the other more traditional symbols of love? Cupid and his arrows. Wedding rings. Valentine's Day. Roses. Love knots. And, of course, the heart. We consider the heart to be the center of our physical being and the symbolic source of our emotions, the greatest of which is.... love.

Last week I went on a mini-retreat up north, and as I headed out the door I grabbed some random reading materials, one of which was section C from a newspaper called *The Epoch Times*. Under the heading of *Relationships*, the featured article was called, "A Man, a Can, and the Oil of Love", with a subheading, "Lessons on Keeping our Relationships ... Running Smoothly." It was the story of Ted Lieprandt, a 90 year retired man from Pidgeon, Michigan, up in the thumb area. A businessman and long-time pillar of the community, married to his wife for 67 years, he still enjoys his hobby of woodworking. But he has another interesting hobby; he collects oil cans (just like this one). He has collected cans of many shapes and sizes over the years. And they painted a picture of him for the article, looking something like a Norman Rockwell painting: he's surrounded by his adoring wife and some of his great-grandchildren. He appears to be philosophizing about... the oil can.

Now, we of course know that oil and grease are lubricants that reduce friction, making our machines run smoothly. If you don't use oil and grease appropriately, things get hot, bearings dry up and before long the machine will seize up and fail. But because of advances in technology, oiling and greasing things are not quite as important as they were in earlier generations.

Ted reminds me of my dad. My dad was big into oil. You see, he grew up in the 1930's. His father was a machinist for the *Pennsylvania Railroad*, and oil and lubrication was a big part of his trade. And I am sure he shared that truth with my dad as he grew up. My dad went on to be a flight engineer on C 47's flying over the Himalayas, from India into China back during World War II, and one of his tasks was to make sure that the engines had oil. Because if they didn't, well, that would be a problem.

When I got my first car back in 1965, he always told me to make sure to check the oil. When I graduated from college and bought a van to take off out West, he said, "make sure you change the oil." Two months later when I came home, the first words out of his mouth were, "Did you change your oil?"

Today's Gospel reading is about two types of relationships. First with God, secondly, with our neighbor. Let's start with our neighbor. In some cases, our neighbor is... our spouse, followed

closely by our family. Let's talk about the spouse first. When two young lovers first meet, everything is honky-dory. They look at the world through rose-colored glasses. Their hearts are filled with love for each other. But, there are many negative influences that can change their feelings for each other and so the love of husband and wife can diminish over time.

Let me tell you a story of one such situation. I heard this interview on the AI Kresta radio show a while back. The young lady was from the Midwest and had conservative values. She went to college to become a journalist and she had very high professional values. When she graduated, she took a job with a major East coast magazine called *Cosmopolitan*. She was quite naïve at this point in time, but it turned out that it was quite a liberal publication and the director was a feminist who issued directives that the young journalist found strange. She actually told her young charges to 'bend the truth' in order to make their point. She told them to lie. Well, this type of advice took its toll over a long period of time, and so eventually she became pretty liberal-minded herself. And this caused a growing friction at home. Husband and wife became distant and the marriage began to fail. But at some point, as she tells the story, she came to her senses and decided to go back to her roots, honor her vows and obey the command to love one another. And she used a particular type of oil. In essence, it was the oil of kindness. She decided to show kindness towards her husband. I'll never forget the way she put it. She said, "*I began to treat my husband as if he was a guest in a five-star hotel*". This certainly got his attention and it began the healing process. Today there is no friction in their relationship. They are again, the best of friends. And the gears of their marriage are running smoothly.

But, back to the others. Our neighbors include our immediate friends, acquaintances and then finally ... everyone. As we learned from the parable of the *Good Samaritan*, everybody is our neighbor including those people who are not very likable. And even those who hate us. The Gospel mandate is pretty clear on this. *Love your enemies, and do good to those who persecute you.*

And so we ask, what kind of oil is needed to make our relationships run smoothly, and without friction? Well, a whole list of things. How about some simple things like smiling. A peaceful disposition. A joyful attitude. Respect, kindness. affability, approachability. Being a good listener and not being judgmental. And remember my favorite catchall adjective? Gracious! Be gracious to one another.

Now in many cases, these will be acts of the will. Things that we consciously and deliberately choose to do for the sake of the Kingdom. And they have their origins in the command from Jesus to love your neighbor as yourself. To treat others as you would like to be treated; the proverbial *Golden Rule*. Do this and the world becomes a better place. There is more harmony and less friction when people freely choose to obey the command. Again, as He said at the Last Supper, "*I give you a new commandment: Love One another, as I have loved you.*"

OK then, how about the first and greatest commandment, to love God? And not just to love Him, but to love Him with all of your being ... *with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole soul and all of your strength*. This might present some challenges, too, for a whole host of reasons.

For the most part, I would say we know and believe that God loves us. However, there are times when we feel that He doesn't – He can seem very distant. Can He really see me? Does He really care about me? Does He really know me? If we succumb to these thoughts, then we can end up distancing ourselves from Him and our relationship with God can suffer and fail.

And so how do we treat him? Once upon a time, many years ago in France, He appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alcoque. It was the apparition of the Sacred Heart. Again, the heart, the ultimate symbol of love. His message, His lament to us through her, was, "*Behold the heart that so loved men and yet receives so little love in return.*" That is why the heart up there is surrounded by thorns and pierced.

So yes, Jesus wants to be loved. But what kind of oil should we use to keep that relationship flowing smoothly? Well, most certainly prayer. It is within prayer that we can express our feelings to the Lord. There are simple things we can say. The same things that we are called upon to say down here on the earthly plane, to each other. Words of love. And we have gotten some coaching by way of the scriptures, like the Psalms. Take, for instance, Psalm 18 which simply says, "*I love you, Lord. I love you Lord my strength.*" Another one of those short prayers, we can pray on the run.

But sometimes, just being in the presence of a loved one suffices to keep the relationship vibrant, with all the parts flowing smoothly. And Jesus asks that of us as well. "*Spend time with Me,*" He says, that is "*abide with me as I abide with you.*" He is personally available to us in the most important and intimate setting. I am talking about His *Real Presence* in the Eucharist. He's here. This is His home on earth as it is in every Catholic Church. Jesus is present, body, blood, soul and divinity in the tabernacle. Come visit with Him in His home. Come spend an hour, or if need be, spend a minute. I am sure He appreciates every moment.

In a few moments, we will be singing a song that I think represents our challenge in loving the Lord. The words will be up on the screen for us. The title line poses the question: *Jesus, my Lord, my God, my all, how can I love Thee as an ought?* The answer, again, is there in the tabernacle. It's a request: "*Sweet Sacrament, we Thee adore, O make us love Thee more and more.*" ... O make ME love Thee more and more.

~Fr. John