

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Three men were sailing together in the Pacific Ocean. Their vessel was wrecked, and they found themselves on an island. They had plenty of food, but their existence was in every way different from what their lives had been in the past. The men were walking by the seashore one day after they had been there for some months and found an ancient lantern. One man picked it up. As he began to rub it and clean it, a genie popped out and said, "Well, since you have been good enough to release me, I will give each of you one wish." The first man said, "Oh, that's perfectly marvelous. I'm a cattleman from Wyoming and I wish I were back on my ranch." Poof! He was back on his ranch. The second man said, "Well, I'm a stockbroker from New York, and I wish that I were back in Manhattan." Poof! He was back in Manhattan with his papers, his telephones, his clients, and his computers. The third fellow was somewhat more relaxed about life and actually had rather enjoyed life there on the island. He said, "Well, I am quite happy here. I just wish my two friends were back." Poof! Poof!

Dear Friends,

The word 'love' has so many meanings as you use in different situations. Love is simple as well as complex in its nature. All our actions and life are based on this four-letter word, love. It depends on how it is used. Though Ancient Greek language has more words for love, they used these seven words to differentiate love in different levels: Agape: brotherly love, Charity: love for God and man, Eros: intimate love, Philia: friendship, love of the equals, Storge: love of the parents and children, Philautia: self-love, Xenia: guest host relationship, and Ludus: playful love.

Today's readings focus on the love of God and love of neighbor as ourselves. In the first reading, Moses was trying to instill the commandments to people after their return from the Exile. His main thing was to make them loyal to God by following the commandments.

In the gospel, Jesus has been asked so many questions about other things by the pharisees, Sadducees and scribes of the law to ensnare him. Jesus cleverly answered all their questions. He gave a straightforward answer to them. True religion, Jesus says, is loving God by loving service. That is, the only way a person can demonstrate real love for God is by showing genuine, active love for your neighbor. The "Great Commandment in the Law" is really threefold: We are commanded (1) to love God, (2) to love our neighbor, and (3) to love ourselves.

God loves everybody and everything perfectly. Fr. Ron Rolheiser (A retreat preacher and a writer) explains, "God's love is simple, pure and unconditional. He loves the same way

with Mary and Satan. God loves Satan as much as God loves Mary. The difference is not in how God loves them, but in how they, each in turn, love God." God loves each of them in the same way, namely, perfectly. But obviously Mary's response is very different from Satan's.

When we respond to love God, it is always including the neighbors and ourselves. Let us whole heartedly love one another and love God. Let us prove with some actions that we love our neighbor and God.