

New Brighton, Sunday 24th September 2023

17th Sunday after Pentecost

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“The Gospel, which is now assigned to the Mass of the seventeenth Sunday, has given it the name of the Sunday of the love of God.”¹

This is how Dom Guéranger, the great Abbot of Solesmes introduce his meditation and commentary upon this 17th Sunday after Pentecost.

“You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”²

Our Lord Jesus Christ couldn’t make it clearer. The virtue of Charity, which was given to us as the gift of the Divine Life with the sacred unction of the Baptism, can only be lived through its constant practice, first towards God, and in the meantime towards our neighbour.

As Jesus himself told St Peter, “loving God is to love our neighbour also, as it appeared, where it is written: ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him: ‘Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love thee.’ Jesus saith unto him: ‘Feed My sheep’”³

“God made men wearing his own image and likeness, so he also provided men with a power of loving which clearly reflects the love due to the godhead. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, he said, with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind. This is the greatest of the commandments and the first. And the second, its like, is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Why do we love God? “The reason we love God,” says St. Bernard, “is God himself” – meaning that we love God because he is the supreme and infinite goodness. But why does charity include love of ourselves? Why, because we are wearing God’s image and likeness; and since all men enjoy the same noble dignity, we love them too as we love ourselves – in other words, as devoted living likenesses of the godhead.”⁴

In very few words, St Francis de Sales explained to us these sentences of the Gospel which were presented to our meditation this morning. The Love of God and the Love of our neighbour are so linked, that one can’t go without the other. God and our neighbour are like

¹ Dom Guéranger, The Liturgical Year, 17th Sunday after Pentecost.

² Mt., XXII, 37-40. 17th Sunday after Pentecost.

³ Roman Breviary, 17th Sunday after Pentecost, at Matins before 1960, 9th lesson.

⁴ St. Francis de Sales, Treaty on the Love of God, X, 11.

the two wooden parts of a loom, in between the threads are put under tension to make a fabric or a tapestry. The threads in between each part are our acts of Charity moving from God to Our neighbour, and from our neighbour to God. The weft threads, making unity and beauty of the tapestry, or the canvas, are the grace of God and the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ. They are interweaving between the warp thread, to make the fabric and give it strength, like the grace is obtaining our merits and makes all our good actions holy and pleasant in the sight of God.

Unfortunately, sometimes, the weft thread, the grace, seems to miss the warp thread, our acts of charity. Not because of the grace, of course, but because our actions are not properly ordered, as we preferred to follow our own will and desires, choosing our own perfection and satisfaction. As a result, a hole, a hitch appears on the canvas of our spiritual life. It can only be solved and repaired with the acceptance and the acknowledgment of our own misery.

We could formulate so many excuses for this hitch, such as, it's because of distractions in prayers, or because I can't really stand this person in front of me,... please Lord have me excused. But, in reality, it's always our pride, the root of all our sins, which is the guilty one. We are the one to blame, not the others.

We ought to learn from God himself how to love our neighbour. St Francis de Sales continues his meditation upon the resemblance between God and His creature, to help us to reach the union of Charity that God is expecting us to attain.

“Heaven knows, then, we should draw one another's attention to the fact that each person we see is wearing God's image and likeness! We should embrace our neighbour, weep over him. We should heap endless blessings upon his head. And why? - out of love for him? Oh dear, no; after all, we cannot tell whether, in himself, he deserves love or displeasure. Why, then? Out of love for God, of course! - for God, who fashioned him to his own image and likeness, and so made him fit to share in the divine goodness, grace and glory. Out of love for God, I repeat: from whom he comes, to whom he will go, through whom he exists, in whom he dwells, for whom he lives, and whom he resembles in a most intimate way.

That is why charity not only many a time commands us to love our neighbour, but itself breeds and spreads this love in our human heart as its own image and likeness; for just as man wears God's image, so does man's charity towards his fellow-man wear the true likeness of man's charity towards God.”⁵

As we are also celebrating today Our Lady of Walsingham, patroness of the Dowry of Mary, let's implore from our Mother in Heaven the grace of perfect Charity, both toward Our Loving Creator, and our dear neighbour.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁵ St. Francis de Sales, Treaty on the Love of God, X, 11.