

24th Sunday after Pentecost: The Human Composite

A sermon by Rev. Fr. David G. Subu
Delivered on November 26, 2006

Ephesians 2:14-22,

Luke 10:25-37: ²⁵And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" ²⁷So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' " ²⁸And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live..."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

Today we encounter once again the parable of the Good Samaritan. Yet we ought not to neglect the conversation which inspired this story, the context in which it was given. A Young lawyer was listening to Jesus and stood up to test Him. The term lawyer here means "an expert in the Law" of Moses specifically, not an advocate in civil matters. Christ was and still is constantly being put to the test by the experts. In this case, the question was "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" So Christ, like a good teacher, answers him with another question, "What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?" The man answers: '*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,*' and '*your neighbor as yourself.*' And to this the Lord said, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." By this the Lord also reaffirms that it is not the works of the Law that save, that is, the ritual observances, sacrifices, rules and regulations, what the Apostle Paul calls in today's epistle "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," but rather the internal state of the human being towards God. Specifically, what matters most is the state and expression of love. Here then are given to us five dimensions of loving God by which we may enter eternal life.

The Parable of the Samaritan comes to us then as an explanation of the fifth dimension of loving God, because to love one's neighbor is to love God. However, we ought to consider the

first four dimensions of loving God as well, since without them, our love for our neighbor will not be true. These first four dimensions of the young lawyer's answer comes to us from Deuteronomy, the fifth and last book of the Law of Moses:

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! ⁵“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. [*Deuteronomy does not include ‘mind’, though the Lord himself includes it in Matt. 22:37*] ⁶“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut. 6)

Thus the Lord directs us to incorporate His commandments into our daily lives and instructs us to share them with our children and grandchildren. Therefore, specifically, what does it mean to love God with all our heart, all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind? The first thing is that indicates that human beings are not simple, one-dimensional beings, but complex composites. Our spiritual life must exist within us on a number of levels in order for true and lasting transfiguration to occur. In our pre-communion prayers we ask that God “Sanctify my heart, soul, mind, and body.” God is concerned with our whole being.

The first dimension given is the heart. Rightly so, for the Bible and the teaching of the fathers both treat the heart as the center of the human being. Its role is so important it is immediately reaffirmed in Deuteronomy: *these words which I command you today shall be in your heart*, not the mind nor the psyche (soul). When the fathers speak of heart, they have a much deeper idea than the sentimental image of Valentine's Day, or the technical information of the cardiologist. The heart is the seat and center of personhood, without which nothing else lives, spiritually as well as biologically. When we pray, we are called to pray in and from our hearts, not our heads or our intellect, and not from our gut, or our emotions. We seek not only a renewing of our mind and the health of our bodies but most importantly, the transformation of

our hearts. This is the first and most essential arena of spiritual growth and struggle, and of course, the source of our ability to love. The person who is seeking to love God begins with paying attention to the heart, and making sure it is open to love, quick to forgive, and filled with prayer in the name of Jesus Christ

The soul, or *psyche* in Greek, is the inner state of man coming out from that center. The soul is that aspect which is so easily affected by the world and temptations. The concept of soul is another one which has suffered from a loss of biblical understanding. It is not the same as the Spirit, nor is it the same as our mind. It reflects the natural psychological reality of man, and thus can be either spiritually oriented or materially oriented. Psyche reflects the natural soul that animates our bodies and makes us alive, even though we may be spiritually dead. (1 Cor. 2:14) The soul includes our consciousness, our awareness, and is constantly being pulled between being either the slave of the senses and the pleasures of the world, or becoming the master of our sense and experiences by itself serving the Spirit. The soul thus includes our conscience and our personality, those things which serve as a gateway or window to our hearts. The person loving God must seek to keep a vigilant soul by guarding what comes in lest something worse come out.

We also must love God with all our strength. This reminds us that loving God is not just an internal affair but also one lived and expressed in the body physically. Our strength, our might, includes our will to do and to act in a loving manner. It is one thing to say we love God and another to stand up and pray, or to kneel and prostrate ourselves. It is one thing to say that we guard our senses, and another to feel the hunger of fasting as we truly work to master our appetite. To love God with all our strength is to put our energies into performing the acts of love, and resisting the temptations which would make us weak. We are bodily creatures, and having a healthy body requires the expenditure of energy, or strength. How can we say we love God when

we do not even want to get up in the morning to pray or take time before we sleep? Only when we dedicate our bodily energies to loving the Lord can we fulfill the prayer of St. Paul at the beginning of Romans 12: “¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (or literally, worship).

Lastly, we must love God with our entire mind. The Greek term used here is *dianoia*, an active word implying the thinking, exercised mind. This comes last because the mind that is not in tune with its heart, is not guarded by the soul and is not supported by strength, will be a wavering and double mind in its thought. We see the effects of an unguarded mind in the world today as there are so many teachers with so many ideas that amount to so much garbage. Thus St. Paul continues in Chapter 12 of Romans, “²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” To love God with our mind is therefore to feed the mind with an intelligent and sensible understanding of God. Knowing about God, learning the bible, developing a theological education throughout life (not only as children in Sunday school)—these things do not insure love of God by any means—but they certainly are essential. It is difficult to say we love another person if we do not bother to know how they think or what ideas they have. We would say that we do not truly know them. Therefore, how much more must we attend to renewing our mind with the light of the Scriptures, with the study of God’s word. Indeed, we cannot say we love God if we do not also give Him our mind through study and contemplation. Remember that Deuteronomy says, ⁷“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when

you lie down, and when you rise up.” This requires an active and engaged mind, not just a peaceful soul, an open heart, and a strong will.

Having considered these four dimensions of loving God which correspond to the four main dimensions of the human being, we only then can come to the last dimension: relationship. The lawyer who tested Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was “love your neighbor as yourself.” He was quoting from Leviticus, the third book of the Law, and it behooves us to consider the full context of those words. In them God lays out the proper attitude we should have towards our neighbor:

¹⁵‘You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶‘You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

These commandments may at first seem contradictory. How is one to not take a stand against one’s neighbor but at the same time rebuke them so as to not bear sin because of them? To love one’s neighbor means to withhold judgment against them out of love and humility while at the same time avoiding the temptations of peer pressure and conforming to the world. Thus we can see the inter-connection of loving one’s neighbor and loving God through our whole being.

A person who does not know themselves and know their neighbor will have a difficult time knowing and loving God. The Good Samaritan is not an accident. He represents a person whose ability to love God is engaged heart, soul, mind and body is revealed in his encounter with the man on the roadside whom he helps. He is impartial, and loves his neighbor as himself. This is reflected in his character. By the time he gets to the point of loving his neighbor, he already loves God—heart, soul, mind and body. Without that love he is just another passer-by. In fact,

one cannot truly love God, the invisible, eternal, indescribable One, without first knowing how to love those earthly reflections of His Glory, our fellow human beings.