

HOMILY FOR THE 30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Readings: Exodus 22:20–26; 1 Thessalonians 1:5c–10; Matthew 22:34–40

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Some time ago, during my visit to Ephesus in Turkey, I had the opportunity to experience a place deeply connected with the early history of Christianity. According to Christian tradition, St John spent the final years of his life in Ephesus, and the Blessed Virgin Mary also lived in that region under his care. Being there helped me reflect more deeply on the lives of those who knew Jesus personally and carried His message to the world.

I was reminded of an old Christian tradition about St John. It is said that, in his old age, when he was too weak to preach long sermons, he would be carried into the Christian assembly at Ephesus. Each time, he would repeat the same words: **“My little children, love one another.”** When people asked why he kept repeating the same message, he is said to have replied that it was the Lord's command and that, if they practised it, it was enough. Although we cannot verify every detail of this story, its message is deeply meaningful. After a lifetime of following Jesus, St John is remembered for emphasising one essential truth: love is at the heart of our Christian faith.

As I remembered this tradition during my visit to Ephesus, I wondered: If St John were to visit our parish today, what would he say to us? Perhaps he would simply repeat the same words: “My little children, love one another.” This is also the central message of today's Gospel.

In the Gospel, a Pharisee who is an expert in the Law asks Jesus, “Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest?” The question comes in the context of discussions among Jewish religious teachers about the commandments. Jesus answers by bringing together two passages from the Old Testament. First, He quotes the Book of Deuteronomy: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Then He adds a second commandment from the Book of Leviticus: “You must love your neighbour as yourself.” Finally, Jesus declares that the whole Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments. In other words, all the commandments of God find their meaning in love. Jesus does not separate love of God from love of neighbour. They belong together. Our love for God must be expressed through the way we treat other people.

We can come to Mass every Sunday, pray the Rosary, read the Bible and observe our religious traditions. All these are important. But if we leave the church and refuse to speak to someone, hold on to resentment, gossip about others or ignore a person in need, we must ask ourselves whether we have truly understood the Gospel. **Our faith is not measured only by how often we pray, but also by how we treat the people around us.**

My visit to Ephesus also reminded me of the importance of St John's teaching in his First Letter: “Anyone who says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, is a liar” (1 John 4:20). These are strong words. John reminds us that we cannot claim to love God while refusing to love His children. Every person has dignity because every person is created by God and loved by Him. Perhaps this is why the tradition about St John's final preaching is so powerful. At the end of a long life, the beloved disciple is remembered for repeating one simple message: love one another. Holiness does not always mean doing extraordinary things. Often, it begins with ordinary acts of love, repeated faithfully every day. It begins when we are patient with someone who is difficult, when

we refuse to join in gossip, when we forgive an old hurt or when we welcome a newcomer into our community.

This is especially important in our parish. A parish is not simply a building where we come to celebrate Mass; it is a family of faith. We may have different opinions, personalities and preferences, and sometimes we may disagree. But we are called to remain united by the love of Christ. The strength of our parish is seen not only in the number of people attending Mass or in the activities we organise, but also in the care we show one another, especially those who are elderly, unwell, grieving or in need of support. When someone comes into our church and experiences genuine welcome and kindness, that person encounters something of Christ's love.

Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. This means allowing God to guide our decisions, making time for prayer, listening to His Word and receiving strength from the Eucharist. But our love for God must flow into our relationships with others. We cannot say that we love the Father while refusing to care for His children. Loving our neighbour does not mean agreeing with everyone or approving of everything. Sometimes love requires us to speak the truth or correct a wrong. But even when we disagree, we must respect the dignity of the other person.

My dear brothers and sisters, as I recall my visit to Ephesus and the Christian tradition associated with St John, I am reminded that the message of Jesus is simple, but it challenges us every day. We can spend a lifetime studying our faith and participating in the life of the Church, but the real test is whether God's love becomes visible in our daily lives.

So let us take home three simple questions today. Do I make time for God in my life? Is there someone I need to forgive or with whom I need to make peace? Is there someone in my family, parish or neighbourhood who needs my kindness, time or support?

We do not have to wait for a great opportunity to love. We can begin today, with the people God has already placed in our lives. And if someone were to ask us what our Christian faith is all about, perhaps we could give the same simple answer that Christian tradition remembers from St John in Ephesus: **"My little children, love one another."**

May the Lord help us to love Him with all our heart, soul and mind, and to express that love through the way we care for one another.

Amen.