

Rome, May 25, 1983¹

Word of Life

The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Gal. 5:14).

This was said by the Apostle Paul. It is brief, wonderful, incisive, clarifying.

It tells us what should be the foundation of our Christian behaviour and what should always be our inspiration: love for our neighbour.

The Apostle sees the fulfilment of the law in the practice of this commandment. The law tells us not to commit adultery, not to kill, not to steal, not to covet... and we know that someone who loves does not do all this. Someone who loves does not kill, does not steal ...

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Someone who loves does not just avoid evil. Those who love are open to others, desire what is good, do what is right, giving themselves: to the point of giving their life for the person loved.

This is why Paul writes that in love for our neighbour not only is the law observed but the whole law is ‘summed up’.

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If the whole law consists in love for our neighbour, we should see the other commandments as means to enlighten and guide us so that, in the intricate situations of life, we can find the way to love others. We need to know how to read God's intention, God's will, in the other commandments.

He wants us to be obedient, chaste, mortified, humble, merciful, poor... in order to carry out the commandment of charity better.

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We might ask, how is it that the Apostle does not mention love for God?

The fact is that love for God and love for our neighbour are not in competition. The one, our love for our neighbour, is the expression of the other, our love for God. Loving God, in fact, means doing God's will. And God's will is that we love our neighbour.

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How are we to put this word into practice?

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It is clear: by loving our neighbour, truly loving our neighbour.

This means: giving, but giving without self-interest, to our neighbour.

Those who use their neighbour as an instrument to achieve their own ends, even the most spiritual, such as their own sanctification, are not loving. We must love our neighbour, not ourselves.

It is certain, however, that someone who loves in this way really will become a saint, will be 'perfect like the Father', because that person will have achieved the very best a human being can achieve. Such a person goes to the heart of God's will, puts it into practice. Such a person wholly fulfils the law.

And isn't this the only thing we will be examined on at the end of our lives?

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