30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George
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Love Yourself as God Loves You

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Jesus tells us in the Gospel today: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." He also gives us another commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We often reflect on how to love God and how to love others; but today, let us reflect on a question we sometimes forget to ask ourselves: Do I really love myself and how do I love myself?

Understanding and loving oneself is also very important, as reaffirmed by Jesus: "Love yourself." If I can't love and respect myself, how can I love and respect others? If I can't reconcile with myself, how can I forgive and reconcile with others? The true self-love begins with something deeper: recognizing that we were created and are loved by God. There begins true Self-love. Imagine standing in front of a mirror. What do you see? Do you see only your imperfections, failures, and weaknesses, or can you look at yourself and say: "I am a beloved child of God. He created me, He loves me, and I have dignity in His eyes"? This would be a good daily spiritual exercise. You will begin to love and appreciate yourself more.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks us to consider the lilies of the field and how beautifully God clothes them. If God cares for the flowers of the field, how much more does He care for us whom He created in His image and likeness! Our worth does not depend on our appearance, achievements, possessions, or the approval of others. Our deepest dignity comes from being created and loved by God. But we must distinguish true self-love from selfishness. St. Thomas Aquinas helps us to understand this distinction. True self-love is not simply satisfying every desire or putting ourselves above others. It means seeking our true good: growing in virtue, becoming holy, and drawing closer to God. We naturally desire happiness and seek to preserve our lives; but remember: not everything we desire is good

for us. When we choose selfish pleasures at the expense of virtue and our relationship with God, our love becomes disordered. When we choose what helps us grow in goodness and holiness, we practise rightly ordered self-love. Aquinas also teaches that God must be loved above all things: to love ourselves rightly and to sincerely desire the good of our neighbours. To love another person as "another self" means that we do not seek only our own happiness; we also desire that person's true good. Therefore, loving ourselves properly does not mean loving others less. It means learning to love ourselves and others according to God's wisdom and love.

Who is our prototype of the true Self-Love? We need look no further than Jesus. His life was rooted in His relationship with the Father. Knowing the Father's love, Jesus gave Himself completely for others. At the Last Supper, He said: "This is my body and blood, which is given for you." On the Cross, He revealed the fullness of His self-giving love. Jesus welcomed sinners, healed the sick, forgave those who had wronged Him, and gave His life for the salvation of the world. He shows us that when our lives are rooted in God's love, we become capable of giving ourselves generously to others. That is the ultimate form of Self love: becoming whole and fulfilled through God's love, which paradoxically frees oneself from selfish obsession.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us compare our lives to a river. A river flows toward the ocean, bringing life and beauty to everything it passes along its banks. But when pollution enters the river, the water becomes dirty and its ability to nourish life is diminished. Our hearts can become like that polluted river. Hatred, jealousy, resentment, and selfishness disturbs our peace and damages our relationships. They prevent us from recognizing our own dignity and in loving others sincerely. When a river is cleansed, its waters become life-giving once again. The same happens in our lives. When we acknowledge our weaknesses, bring them before God, and allow His grace to transform us, our hearts are be renewed. We become more peaceful, forgiving, compassionate, and loving. A heart filled with God's love becomes like a river - bringing goodness, hope, and beauty into the lives of others.

Brothers and sisters: God has entrusted us with both our bodies and our souls. Let us care for them responsibly. Let us acknowledge our weaknesses without forgetting our dignity. Let us avoid selfishness, seek holiness, and allow God's love to transform our lives. When we learn to see ourselves through God's eyes, we begin to understand more deeply how to love Him, and how to love ourselves and our neighbours.

May our lives become like a river flowing peacefully toward the ocean of God's love; bringing peace, hope, and beauty to everyone we encounter.