

MIDWEEK ADVENT 1 – AD TE LEVAVI

Text: Romans 13:8-14; St. Matthew 19:16-26

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In his first epistle, Saint John tells us, *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”*

St. John, then, is in harmony with St. Paul who, this evening, sums up the ten commandments in this way, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* Thus, love is the fulfillment of the Law. To love God and neighbor above oneself is the sum of all the commandments.

Paul also tells us that this is our debt; that we should *“owe no one anything except to love one another.”* Yet, we cannot love our neighbor, whom we have seen, unless we love our God whom we have not seen.

“No problem,” you say, *“I do love God.”* Really? Is God really first and above all things in your life?

Once JESUS, in talking to a young man who asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, told him to sell or give away all he had to the poor, then take up his cross and follow Him. The young man did not follow JESUS, but saddened at CHRIST’s answer and the thought of losing everything, walked away and left Him. The young man, who claimed to have fulfilled the Law, that is, to love God and neighbor above all things, did not love JESUS enough to give up his possessions—to give up all things. I wonder, just how far would you go to follow JESUS?

You see, the Law of God does not only tell us what we are not to do, it also tells us what we are to do. If you love someone, you will not only not kill him, but you will help and support him in every physical need. To love someone means not only never speaking evil of him, but to put the best construction on everything, speaking well of him, and explaining everything in the kindest way. To love your spouse means not only that you are not to commit adultery, but you are to love and honor each other.

And so it goes with all the commandments of God’s Law; love ensures they are kept. But no one loves His neighbor unless he first loves God, and no one can claim to love God unless he also loves his neighbor. These two go hand-in-hand. In fact, to not love God, means to love neither neighbor nor, even truly, oneself.

This, then, is also the sum of all righteousness: to love both God and neighbor. For what is unrighteousness if it is not loving oneself above all other things? For if one loves his neighbor more than himself will he not only do him no evil, but also do him good, and was not the love for oneself what got mankind into trouble in the Garden of Eden in the first place?

Yet, there is even more here, for we are not only to love those who love us in return, for even unbelievers do that; we are to love our enemies as well. JESUS said, *“But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two....”* and also *“...I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”*

So what does it mean then, to love one’s enemy? It simply means to stop hating your enemies and instead pray for them. It means to do your enemies no harm in body, possessions, and honor, but instead, to help them to prosper as God has helped and prospered you. For our LORD JESUS has given us this example: instead of calling down the hosts of heaven to destroy His tormentors, instead of asking His FATHER in Heaven to crush His enemies, He prayed for them, asking forgiveness for them.

“But Pastor,” you ask, *“you cannot really mean that we are to treat our enemies like our friends?”* Yes, beloved, that is exactly what I am saying. You are to love and pray for your enemies, and if you cannot do that, you cannot claim to love God. For you see, your enemies too, are your neighbor.

But the time for learning to love both friend and foe grows short. *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”* St. Paul’s call to cast off the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light must take place in this present age, because in the age to come, there will be no time left to do so. At the return of our LORD all things will be fulfilled and the time for repentance will have been spent. Do not waste your time!

Therefore, repent now, before it is too late! Repent, and turn to your LORD, beseeching His forgiveness. For the truth is, that you often do not even place your loved ones above your own desires, and you certainly do not love your enemies as much as you love yourself.

Repent and lay your lack of love at the feet of your SAVIOR who prayed from His cross for you. For we are so blinded by our sin that we do not comprehend what it is we do. But CHRIST does, and it is for this reason that He has come down to save you. We find it ever so hard to take up our cross and follow Him, so JESUS did it for us. He knows your every weakness. He knows your coldness of heart and your self-centered selfishness. But these, and

all sins, He absorbed into His own flesh with every stripe on His back, and every blow of the hammer as the nails pierced Him and fixed Him to that cruel tree.

The gift of our LORD JESUS' innocent suffering and death, His resurrection on the Third Day, and His ascension into heaven are your greatest possessions—more precious than the purest gold and even more precious than this life. For in them are your forgiveness, your life, and your salvation. All things here in this life pale in comparison.

Thus, wake from your sleep—*“now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”* In Baptism you have *“put on the LORD JESUS CHRIST...”* and every day since that day the fulfillment of all things has drawn closer in the promised return of the only One who has truly fulfilled the Law—our LORD, JESUS CHRIST. It is He who has clothed you in His righteousness, casting off darkness and replacing it with the armor of His light.

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His SON to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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