

10. September 2023

## Love and do what you want

Rom 13:8-10

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

St Augustine left us this wonderful phrase: "Love and do what you want". Indeed, when we love, we have understood the essence of our life. When we love, we respond to the deepest reason for our existence, which is to be loved by God. Charity is the concrete application of this love; it is the effect of being loved by God. Who could close his heart to his brother, knowing that he is infinitely loved? If we really love - which is not the same as desiring - it is love that tells us what to do. In this sense we can understand St Augustine's phrase.

However, we need to be reminded again and again of what true love is and how to put it into practice; for Augustine's phrase sounds wonderful, but it is not so easy to apply correctly. Our ability to love is often hindered by self-love. And overcoming self-love is one of the most difficult spiritual battles, for it follows us everywhere as if it were our shadow.

Now, there is an ordered self-love, because everyone has to take care of his body, his health, etc. And it is right that this should be so! Scripture tells us: "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*" (Lev 19:18; Mk 12:31), making self-love a parameter of charity.

But disordered self-love exceeds the measure set by God and seeks self-interest, often without thought for others or for God. Unfortunately, this is a legacy of original sin, for in that fall man turned away from God's commandment for his own supposed benefit (cf. Gen 3:1-7). In doing so, he wounded his love for God. As a consequence of

this disordered self-love, the first fratricide in human history took place shortly after the fall, when Cain murdered his brother Abel (cf. Gen 4:1-8).

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"*, says the Lord (Jn 14:15), explaining the meaning of these commandments. Evil is preceded by unrestrained desire, and when we give in to it, sin is born (cf. Jas 1:14-15).

On the other hand, if we allow the Holy Spirit, who is the love between the Father and the Son, to work in us, He will make us aware of our disordered desires and offer us His help to overcome them, because love is incapable of harming our neighbour. We do not want to hurt the love of God or the love of our neighbour!

Therefore, our greatest spiritual desire should be to constantly grow in love. Every day offers us many opportunities to do this. By praying and living with our eyes fixed on God, we can discover more and more of His love and accept it more and more deeply in ourselves. This love, in turn, will want to be communicated to others through the proclamation of divine love and through concrete works of charity. Just as God comes to meet us and shows us His love, we too are called to treat our neighbour in the same way. To this end, God Himself will be our teacher.