

In our English language, love has to do with a variety of things: Loving God, loving one another, romantic love, love of family, friends and Redskin football. However, in the English language we only have one word for love, which means using it in the wrong way (or understood incorrectly) and that can get us in all kinds of trouble!

The Greeks, however, had different words for love, depending upon the context. The highest form of love would be Agape and it is more rooted in the one loving i.e. it is not based on whether the other person is attractive or worthy. Agape is great to receive and supernatural to give.

Everyone wants to be loved. So much so that I might say, "I'm going try even harder and hopefully they will love me even more." But wouldn't it be great to just be loved for myself? To be loved "as is"? That would be Agape – God's love.

It is not natural to love someone who does not love you back. It is not natural, because it is supernatural. We are loved. No matter what we are, not matter where we come from or find ourselves, you are loved by God. Nothing will ever change that.

I say this because, self-love has a very important role to play in keeping the greatest commandment. Before we can even begin loving God and our neighbor, we have to love ourselves FIRST.

If I don't see myself as God sees me, as a beloved child of God; as redeemed by the death of Jesus on the cross; and as especially chosen by God to live with God for all eternity, then I will never see others as God sees them.

The Lawyer in the gospel asked Christ which was the first of the commandments. Christ gave him the first, AND the second. The lawyer did not ask for the second; he asked only for the first. Christ made it clear that you cannot understand one without the other.

The first and the greatest commandment, love of God does not stand alone. Love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable, two parts of one law. Love of God must express itself in love of neighbor, and in loving our neighbor we express our love of God.

The two great commandments tell us that if we want to know how much we love God, we need only look at how we love the people we live with each day.

+Near Christmas time many of us put up those lights that are wired in series. The electricity comes into the wire then comes into the bulb, the first bulb, and then goes up through the bulb and its filament and then back into the line on to the next bulb and so on through the entire chain of lights.

And as it flows, not only into each of those lights but out of each of those lights, then the entire circuit is completed, and the string of lights is bright. Do you remember, those days in which if

one were out, none worked? If there was a light that's loose or a filament that's broken, then it receives the electricity but it doesn't pass it along to others.

There's a sense in which that is the way that God has wired us. God has wired us to receive the love of God but he has also wired us to pass it along to others. God's love is made complete in us.

That's what's bright and great, and it's a wonderful opportunity not only to get the love of God, but also to give the love of God. Not only to be loved, but to love as God has loved us. Jesus said that getting and giving love is the greatest evidence that a person is a Christian.

One way of showing this is our giving back to God and in so doing we help our brothers and sisters. Keep that image of those old string of lights. God gives, and our light comes on, but we have to give to the other that the light may glow for the other. Image if all of us gave something, we would be ablaze in God's light. Plus, it keeps the lights on here!

I wish to thank everyone for being attentive to the parish speakers and materials mailed to your homes the past few weeks. For those who have already heeded the call to reflect upon your giving and completed a commitment card - thank you. Your dedication and generosity are deeply appreciated.

For those who are still prayerfully considering the call, commitment cards are located in the pews. Please take a moment to locate one.

I know that each family will have to determine what is an appropriate and reasonable level of offertory support. I ask that each family begin by making a commitment to give regularly. This is the first and most important step. This ties you on a consistent basis with the Church's work and Christ's message because "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

If you are already giving regularly, then I ask you to look at the level of your support. Are you giving what you think you should be giving? If so, fine. If not, what steps can you take to close the gap between what you're giving now and where you'd like to be?

At this time, please take a moment to complete the commitment by indicating the amount you will be giving to offertory either on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis. If you would like to tailor your giving as a response to God's blessings to you, on the reverse side of the commitment card lists different income amounts and possible weekly gifts by %.

If you have already completed a card, please take a moment to pray our stewardship prayer that it located in the pews.