

Love of Neighbor
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“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.¹” When Jesus speaks about loving one’s neighbor, He is referring to a specific type of love. Today, love is widely understood as a feeling in which everyone feels happy toward each other and there is no displeasure. While love can be supplemented by good feelings, Jesus wants us to understand and practice what true love entails.

The Catechism defines love as “to will the good of another.”² This true meaning of love gives us a sense of sacrifice and selflessness. Though love in the sense of a feeling may be easier, Jesus sets the standards high. Jesus is the perfect model for how to love; through immeasurable pain and bloodshed, Jesus died for love of us. If one understands love as avoiding all uncomfortable instances for the sake of personal pleasure, Jesus’ suffering would not have any worth to us. In order to love others as ourselves we must first know what love means, but we also must understand what Jesus means by “love your neighbor as *yourself*.” When speaking about how to love yourself we must think about it in two ways. Firstly, remember that we are called to “nourish and cherish” ourselves as Christ does the church. We are said to be a temple of the Holy Spirit which we must care for continually.³ Likewise, we must also see others as made uniquely good by God, and therefore treat them with equal respect and care. Secondly, it is important to understand that love of self is not meant to be prideful; rather a love in which we must go *outside* of ourselves to grow in virtue.

¹ John 15:13 (NAB)

² Catechism of the Catholic Church 1766

³ Ephesians 5:29

Sometimes it is hard to apply this love of neighbor in everyday life simply because we forget who our neighbor in the world is. It is easy to love people when life is going smoothly or when the people are easy to get along with, as well as those who are trying to selflessly love. However, the most difficult people to get along with are those neighbors that need love the most. When asking the question “who is my neighbor in the world?” the fantastic lady down the street who delivers homemade cookies for your birthday always seems to pop into mind first. Though we must also love her (and her cookies), we must more importantly think of the outcasts of society. In Jesus’ time, outward plagues, such as leprosy, made people afraid of loving the degraded; in 21st century America those “lepers” may not be as easily spotted. The elderly, the mentally ill, the depressed, the left, the right, the weirdos, the gamers, the stoners, the idiots, the control freaks, the vain, the anxious, the *labelled* all need love. **“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”**⁴

⁴ Matthew 25:40