

# From the Gospel: The measure of faith

If the measure of faith is love of God, then the measure of love of God is the love of neighbour

Community

Religion

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 3 min read

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What if social, economic and political programmes were motivated by love of the other and not by personal gain or ideology? Photo: Shutterstock.com

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30th Sunday in ordinary time, Cycle A. Today's readings: [Exodus 22:20-26](#); 1 [Thessalonians 1:5c-10](#); [Matthew 22:34-40](#)

What could a cloistered nun who lived more than a century ago, and who did not live past her 24th birthday, offer today's rapidly changing world? Not much you might say. But UNESCO and Pope Francis would beg to differ.

On the 150th anniversary of the birth of [St Theresa of Lisieux](#), [the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is celebrating her](#) as a “woman of culture, education and science” who, through “her personality and her work, scrutinises the depths of the human heart and opens possible paths of response to men and women of this world in search of meaning, in search of personal and universal peace”.

To mark the same anniversary, the pope has also issued an apostolic exhortation, [C'est la confiance](#). In it he highlights St Theresa's simple but intense love for God, which was anything but naive. Despite being tormented by trials of faith she responded with love towards God and towards others. “To love is to give oneself”, Francis quotes her as saying.

This French mystic can offer us a corrective to our contemporary atrophied understanding of love. Just imagine what something as powerful as love could do to our social imaginary and our entire political world view.

“ It is only when I realise that my well-being is deeply connected with the well-being of others that I understand what it means to love others as I love myself

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Today's first reading from Isaiah describes the kind of attitude to be practised with the poor, which included those hailing from foreign lands, the widows who had nobody to provide them with a living, and orphans who lived on the streets at the mercy of passers-by.

What if disenfranchised were really loved and not simply tolerated? What if social, economic and political programmes were motivated by love of the other and not by personal gain or ideology?

In today's gospel, the scholar of the law asked Jesus which was the first commandment, in light of which all other commandments were to be interpreted. Jesus's twofold response about the love of God and love of neighbour brings home an important point: Christianity would be little more than just another identity if it is not animated by love.

Our faith in God is best expressed in our readiness to love God fully and with all our being: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Note that true love can never settle for incomplete or half-hearted expressions otherwise it is no love at all.

If the measure of faith is love of God, then the measure of love of God is the love of neighbour. This is why Jesus joins a second commandment to the first: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Unfortunately, nowadays the expression love of self has become so distorted that it could hardly be distinguished from self-centredness or even egoism. This is not, of course, what Jesus meant.

It is only when I realise that my well-being is deeply connected with that of others that I understand what it means to love others as I love myself. Not only would I refrain from doing anything that might ever harm others. Neither would it mean merely doing an occasional act of charity for others. It is an invitation to love others, to create a void, a tension that could only be filled with love of him or her who is radically other to myself.

In a world that is so fragmented because of conflicting interests and priorities, Jesus's invitation to orient our whole selves, our affective desires, spiritual capacities and rational

powers, to the love of God, opens us up to see ourselves in others. This is essentially an ethical call for a life of integrity, which is essential for the shared life that we live in common.

To quote French philosopher [Paul Ricoeur](#), “I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself.”

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