

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Heart That Learns to Love

1962 Roman Missal · 20 September 2026 · Homily

Sometimes the hardest distance to cross is the distance between knowing what love requires and speaking the next sentence. Someone has irritated us. We have an answer ready. It may even be a true answer. But we also know how to make it hurt. In that small interval before we speak, the command to love becomes very concrete. Will we seek this person's good, or enjoy the chance to wound?

Today's Gospel reaches into that interval. A doctor of the law asks Jesus which commandment is greatest. Jesus answers with love of God: the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole mind. Then he joins to it love of our neighbor as ourselves. The law and the prophets depend on these two commands. Love gives direction to the whole of life, including the words that are about to leave our mouths.

That word "whole" can trouble us. We know how divided we can be. We want to love God, and we want to keep a little territory in which our resentment rules. We want to be patient, and we want the pleasure of having the last word. Must we wait until every feeling has become generous before we can begin to obey?

Saint Augustine helps us hear what the command asks. The whole person is to be directed toward God. No part of life is to be kept outside that love. Our minds, our choices, our desires, and our treatment of others belong to him. That direction can be real even while our hearts still need healing. We can refuse the cruel sentence while still feeling angry. We can do the good before it becomes easy.

And the neighbor belongs within this same love. Saint John Chrysostom explains the connection: loving God includes obeying him, and God commands us to love our neighbor. We cannot honor his command in church and dismiss it when a difficult person comes near. The person we find troublesome has a good that we are called to seek. The command is wider than our circle of friends.

Saint Paul gives this love a shape in the Epistle. He asks for humility, meekness, patience, and bearing with one another in charity. These are demanding

words because they concern the people actually given to us. Humility makes room to listen. Meekness restrains the wish to overpower. Patience accepts that another person's growth may take time. Bearing with someone means continuing to seek that person's good when doing so costs us something.

This does not make every argument unnecessary or every fault harmless. A truthful word may be needed. Saint Thomas Aquinas says that charitable patience can include correction at a fitting time. The question is what our truthfulness serves. Are we helping someone face what is wrong, or using what is wrong as permission to humiliate? Charity can speak firmly. It cannot take pleasure in another person's degradation.

Paul grounds this conduct in what we have received together. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. We do not create that common life by deciding that everyone else is agreeable. We receive it from God. Then we are charged with caring for it. The person whose manner tries our patience has not become disposable because patience is difficult.

Yet hearing all this can leave us with another burden. We know what love requires. We can describe patience. We may even be able to explain it to someone else. Where will the strength to live it come from?

Listen to the prayers of this Mass. From the beginning, we acknowledge that God's judgment is right and ask him to deal with his servant according to mercy. The opening prayer asks him to free his people from the devil's corrupting influence and enable them to follow him alone with a pure mind. At the end, the Church will ask that the sacred mysteries cure our vices and bring us an eternal remedy. The command to love is surrounded by prayer for healing.

Augustine notices this dependence in the psalm from which our opening chant is taken. The servant asks for mercy and for God's teaching. He needs more than approval for a goodness already achieved by his

own strength. He needs God to make him righteous. We come before God with that same need. Honest confession gives up the defense of our cruelty. Mercy gives us hope of becoming different.

The Gospel itself directs us toward the giver of that mercy. After answering the question about love, Jesus asks a question of his own: whose son is the Christ? His hearers answer that he is David's son. Then Jesus brings them to the psalm in which David calls the Christ his Lord. How can David's son also be David's Lord?

Chrysostom explains that Jesus leaves his descent from David intact while showing that descent to be an incomplete answer. The Christ is more than a merely human descendant. David himself worships him as Lord. The one who commands our love is the divine Lord. We are being called into allegiance to him, beyond admiration for a wise answer.

That is why our hope at Mass reaches deeper than encouragement to try harder. Christ gives himself. Saint Thomas describes the Eucharist as nourishment for spiritual life, drawing its power from Christ and his Passion. Food sustains the living; the sacrament nourishes the life of grace and strengthens charity. The Lord who asks for the whole heart gives the help by which that heart can be healed.

His gift also reaches the life ahead of us. The prayer over the offerings asks that the holy action free us from offenses past and future. We are asking for cleansing and preservation. We are still free, and still capable of turning away. Receiving grace does not make our next choice unimportant. It makes faithful action possible, and calls us to cooperate with what we receive.

So bring one real difficulty into this Mass. Think of a relationship in which love has become mostly an argument about the other person's faults. Name honestly the part that is yours: the contempt, the sharp reply, the refusal to listen, the duty postponed. Ask for mercy there. Then choose one faithful act within your responsibility. Perhaps it is to listen without preparing a retort, to apologize without adding an accusation, or to say a necessary truth with patience.

Do not measure that act only by whether it immediately changes the other person. You are seeking that person's good and learning to follow your Lord. You may need to repeat the act tomorrow. You may need to acknowledge failure and begin again. The Church's final prayer gives us room for that honest perseverance: even after receiving the mysteries, we ask for the cure of our vices. We still need the physician.

And the cure has an eternal purpose. Paul speaks of one hope; the Mass asks for an eternal remedy. The patience learned now belongs to a love that God calls into perfect peace with himself and his saints. Our small acts of charity open toward that lasting communion. They matter because the people we love are called to more than a moment of relief, and because Christ's gift is greater than our present weakness.

The next sentence will come. The difficult person will still be a person whom God commands us to love. But we need not face that moment with our own resources alone. David's Lord is our Lord. He gives life to his people and healing to wounded hearts. Let the mercy received here become patience there. Let the heart that asks to be healed begin to love.

Source and delivery note

The spoken homily ends on the preceding page. Intended audience: an adult parish assembly. Its 1,283 spoken words suggest approximately 10.7–11.7 minutes at 110–120 words per minute, allowing an unhurried pace. This is a word-count estimate, not a timed human delivery. A silent editorial reading checked sentence sense, transitions, oral clarity, and the return to the opening image; no audible rehearsal is claimed.

The argument derives principally from the reviewed study's *God heals the heart that he commands to love*, with compatible applications of shared baptism and continuing fidelity from its other two readings. It joins Matthew's commands and revelation of Christ's lordship, Paul's patient charity, and the Mass's petitions for grace and sacramental healing. The whole-Mass construction and practical applications are editorial; no Father is credited with this complete homily. Both the expansive and concise studies received independent workflow review before this derivation. This authored homily is not an official liturgical text or an assertion of ecclesiastical approval. The celebration is the universal 1962 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, studied for 20 September 2026; no local calendar has been specified.

The prayer explanations follow the *Missale Romanum* (1962), and biblical wording follows the historical Douay–Rheims study witness. Exact sources follow, entirely outside the speech.

References

1. *Missale Romanum*, Vatican typical edition (1962), pp. 398–400, nos. 1602–1611: especially Introit, Collect, Secret and Postcommunion. The speech explains the prayers; it supplies no text for ritual recitation.
2. *Douay–Rheims Bible*, American 1899 edition, retained eBible transcription: Matt. 22:34–46; Eph. 4:1–6; Ps. 118:124,137 (common modern Ps. 119). Public-domain study English; the speech principally paraphrases these appointed passages.
3. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, I.22.20–21, NPNF1, vol. 2; *Expositions on the Psalms*, Ps. 118, English paragraph 123, NPNF1, vol. 8, abridged English under Psalm 119. Retained CCEL witnesses; attributed paraphrase.
4. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, hom. 71, opening exposition of Matt. 22:37–46, Prevost/Riddle English, NPNF1, vol. 10 (1888), retained CCEL text: the commands' connection and David's Son and Lord.
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam ad Ephesios*, ch. 4, lect. 1, Dessain Latin edition, vol. 2 (1857), pp. 312–315: patient charity and fitting correction. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 79, aa. 1–2,6, corpus, and a. 6 ad 1, English Dominican translation in the Gutenberg Tertia electronic edition (2006): nourishment through Christ and his Passion, eternal fruit, preservation and continuing freedom. The electronic witness discloses editorial modifications. This sacramental teaching illuminates the prayers; it does not explain their historical composition.

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