Love Your Neighbour: Agape Love Without Keeping Score

Readings: 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8 and Matthew 22:34–end

Have you ever received an expensive birthday present and immediately started worrying about what you should give in return? You appreciate the gift, but then you start comparing prices, planning the next birthday and wondering whether you have repaid the kindness.

Sometimes, our relationships become like an accounting exercise: who gave what, who owes whom, and whether we have done enough in return.

But agape love does not keep score. It gives because the other person matters, not because we expect something in return.

In Matthew 22, Jesus brings together two great commandments: love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and love your neighbour as yourself. In our reading from 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes his ministry as being like a nurse tenderly caring for her children. These readings help us understand how God's love can become visible in our everyday lives.

Let me share three lessons from the example of a nurse.

1. Love tells the truth with tenderness

Paul writes, “We were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children” (1 Thessalonians 2:7).

A good nurse sometimes has to tell a patient difficult truths. But the truth is communicated with care because the patient's well-being matters. Love does not mean agreeing with everything or remaining silent when something is wrong. It means speaking honestly without humiliating others.

I remember my aunt, who was a nurse in India and later worked in Libya as Matron of Tripoli Medical Hospital. During a time of war, she was asked to protect the grandchildren of Libya's leader. She accepted this responsibility, and the leader reportedly recognised that her Christian faith had inspired her kindness.

Her faith became visible through her actions. She did not simply speak about love; she demonstrated it.

As Christians, we are called to do the same: to speak the truth with compassion, challenge injustice without cruelty, and treat people with dignity even when we disagree with them.

2. Love sees the person, not just the problem

When my father became unwell and needed hospital care, young nurses helped him with everything from feeding to bathing. Initially, he felt uncomfortable accepting such personal care. But the nurses treated him with the tenderness and respect they might show their own grandfather. Their kindness helped him feel more at ease.

They did more than perform their duties. They cared for the person.

We see this caring vocation in people such as Florence Nightingale, who helped transform nursing, and Dr Ida Scudder, who devoted her life to medical mission in India and established the medical work that grew into Christian Medical College, Vellore.

We are grateful for doctors, nurses, carers, paramedics, midwives and all other medical professionals who serve people in vulnerable moments. Their care reminds us that love is not merely a feeling; it requires attention, patience and action.

In our own community, someone may be grieving, living with dementia, waiting for medical results or feeling lonely. We may not be able to solve their problems, but we can listen, visit, offer practical help and protect their dignity.

Agape love asks, “What does this person need?” rather than, “What will I get in return?”

3. Love helps others to grow

There is a story about a king who received two magnificent falcons. One soared high in the sky, but the other remained on its branch and refused to fly. The king tried everything until he called a farmer. The next morning, the falcon was flying freely.

The king asked the farmer how he had achieved this. The farmer replied, “Your Majesty, I simply cut the branch on which the bird was sitting.”

Sometimes, we become so comfortable with familiar routines that we are afraid to move forward. The saints and faithful people who have influenced our lives encourage us to leave our comfortable branches and discover what God can do through us.

Perhaps someone believed in you when you lacked confidence. Perhaps a parent, teacher, friend or church member encouraged you to take a step you thought was impossible. They may never be recognised publicly, but their influence helped you grow.

This is how we can serve one another: by encouraging others, sharing our gifts and helping people discover their potential.

Of course, caring for others does not mean neglecting ourselves. Nurses and carers need support, rest and care too. Agape love is generous, but it also recognises our human limitations.

Comments:

Dear friends, Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbour. Paul shows us that love involves sharing not only our words but also our lives.

This week, let us practise agape love in three simple ways:

- Speak the truth with tenderness.
- Notice someone who needs care and listen patiently.
- Give time and support without keeping score.

Our neighbour may be someone we love easily, or someone with whom we struggle. We may never receive thanks or have our kindness returned. But we love because every person matters to God.

Agape love does not ask, “What will I get in return?” It asks, “How can I help this person experience the goodness of God?”

May we learn from the tenderness of nurses, the dedication of those who serve, and the example of those who have encouraged us. May our love for God become visible in the way we care for others.

For the greatest witness to God's love is not simply what we say in church, but how we make others experience that love beyond its walls.

Amen.