*“Return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul.”*

This return to God is embedded in our very nature. We were made to love God forever. God is love and each of us is made in His image and thus we are made to love Him deeply, intensely, personally and completely.

We are travelling down a road, a road that is to lead us to God. We are to be that love which is needed by so many men, women and children. We will meet them on the way. We will meet them when we don’t expect them. We are to love them as we would love ourselves.

We are to reflect God’s love to a world so hungry, so desperate to see God, to be loved by Him.

If our whole life is a journey, a return, an approaching of God our Father, then our very hearts and souls were made for Him, were made to touch Him, to….. I dare say…. to fall in love with Him!

*“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”*

Think about that! This is a description of love. It is a description of intense, personal love. It is a description of being in love with the Lord.

Jesus reminds us in the Gospel today that we cannot be in love with God if we do not approach our neighbor in distress. We do not truly love God if we avoid, if we do not care for the needs of the poor, the traumatized, the victim, the forgotten, the sick, those on the fringes of society, those difficult to love.

The Gospel of the Good Samaritan is perhaps one of the most well-known Gospel parables. We have all heard it many times. It is a very challenging Gospel for all of us.

It leaves us with a certain inner tension.

On one hand, there is the draw towards the love of God, the intense love we seek with God our Father in heaven.

On the other hand, there are all the needs of people we meet along the road that leads us back to God.

Our lives are caught up in going toward God and caring for others.

Jesus says we cannot get close to God without embracing our neighbor. He also tells us by his own life that we cannot embrace our neighbor without clinging to God in love.

We feel that tension when we think about that, don’t we?

Now, the priest and the Levite thought they could avoid approaching the victim of robbery and still stay holy and pure. They wanted to avoid that tension. They thought they could bypass the needs of the victim because they were on the road to Jerusalem, the holy place. They wanted to offer their sacrifice to God at the Temple and didn’t want to get themselves all mixed up with and dirtied by the physical needs of a victim of a crime.

How mistaken they were!

Let us not make the same mistake.

The tension between wanting to be with the Lord, whom we love, and the needs of the world, especially the poor and forgotten, is a tension that is to be experienced and lived, not avoided.

That is the amazing thing about our God: The more in love we are with Him, the more people He puts in our lives who need our love, His love.

Let us thank all those people. Let us thank them, for they bring us closer to God. Let us thank them for they become a visible reminder of the God whom we are to love with all our being, strength, mind and heart. The God with whom we are to be in love.

They are, if you will, the children born from our love of God!

For us this means that God wants us to love more intensely our wives, husbands, children and our parents. He wants us to love intensely our parish, our neighborhood, our community. He wants us to love our country.

But He also wants us to stand up and advocate for the needs of the victims of poverty, homelessness, crime, and discrimination. He wants us to love our enemies, not make war upon them.

He asks us to be faithful to these tasks he sets before us. He asks for our hearts, our minds, our strength. He loves us more than we can possibly imagine. He allows us to fall in love with Him, and he calls us home where we belong.

In our love for God, let us bind up the wounds of those we meet along the path back to our Father who is in heaven. Let us love Him, let us love them, intensely, personally.

Let us return to the Lord!