

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 97

Reading 1 - [2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a](#)

One day Elisha came to Shunem, where there was a woman of influence, who urged him to dine with her. Afterward, whenever he passed by, he used to stop there to dine. So she said to her husband, "I know that Elisha is a holy man of God. Since he visits us often, let us arrange a little room on the roof and furnish it for him with a bed, table, chair, and lamp, so that when he comes to us he can stay there." Sometime later Elisha arrived and stayed in the room overnight. Later Elisha asked, "Can something be done for her?" His servant Gehazi answered, "Yes! She has no son, and her husband is getting on in years." Elisha said, "Call her." When the woman had been called and stood at the door, Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son."

Responsorial Psalm [Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19](#) - R. (2a) **Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

Reading II - [Romans 6:3-4, 8-11](#)

Brothers and sisters: Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel - [Matthew 10:37-42](#)

Jesus said to his apostles: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because the little one is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward."

Summary

This week's homily explores the theological concept of "rightly ordered love" (*ordo amoris*), a central theme in the liturgical readings for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time. The core thesis is that true love requires a strict hierarchy: God must hold the primary place in the human heart, choices, and sacrifices. When this order is maintained, earthly loves—such as family, work, and neighbor—are not diminished but are instead protected from becoming idols and are purified to become stronger and more faithful. Disordered love, conversely, is defined as elevating lesser goods (even inherently "good" things like family or religious liturgy) above God, which effectively renders such "love" a form of self-interest or idolatry. The capacity to live within this right order is fundamentally granted through the Sacrament of Baptism, which incorporates the believer into the death and resurrection of Christ, providing the grace to be "dead to sin and alive to God." The document outlines the scriptural foundations, patristic interpretations, and practical applications of these principles in daily life.

Conclusion: Freedom Over Rules

The homily concludes that the "rules" of the Church are not burdensome to those living in rightly ordered love. For the person whose heart is centered on God, the rules become secondary to the relationship.

Rightly ordered love provides the freedom to be an "authentic self" in Christ, living as a "child of the light" standing in the "bright light of truth."

Rightly Ordered Love: The Hierarchy of the Heart



Love: Rightly Ordered

Love, when it is fundamentally disordered means: the will's love is redirected away from God who is the true good and source of love, and toward the self as the ultimate standard that often leads to refusing or despising God. The Catechism teaches that such disordered love is an offense against God and that it "*sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it.*"¹ It then goes on to describe some of the interior ways a person can sin against God's love; indifference (neglects/refuses to reflect on God's charity), ingratitude, lukewarmness, acedia (spiritual sloth), and even hatred of God, arising from pride.² Sin is disordered love: self above God.

This is the meaning that underlies the words of Jesus in the Gospel reading. Going beyond the surface of what seems to be his point, we set upon an essential truth about ourselves and God that ought to be the contextualizing reality of our relationships with God, others, self, and the things of this world. It is a truth repeated in various ways and times throughout the scriptures, and we might be able to say, most clearly articulated in the scriptures of the new and eternal covenant in Christ. Though we're not always certain of what 'love rightly ordered' in my life ought to look like, we are nevertheless absolutely certain about what disordered love and feels like; if we have faith or even the faintest light of faith to help us.

This is the Catholic "logic of love": God's love first, then our love for God, and then rightly ordered love for neighbor—made possible by baptismal life in Christ. As Saint John said, "*We love because he first loved us.*"³ Therefore we must love God first. Jesus, quoting from the tradition,⁴ teaches the order and priority of love: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,*

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1850

² Catechism of the Catholic Church 2094

³ 1 John 4:19

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; <https://renew.org/what-is-the-shema-in-the-bible>

and with all your strength.”⁵ The Catechism describes our response as an obligation of sincere love in accord with the first commandment which enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him.⁶ Jesus continued the teaching: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”⁷ From love of God flows love of neighbor. Because love of God is real, it necessarily bears fruit in love of others, “*those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.*”⁸

Rightly ordered love becomes possible through baptism. Paul explains the inner stance baptism gives and the moral consequence it demands: “*consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*”⁹ As the Catechism says: “*Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, Christians are ‘dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus’ and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord.*”¹⁰ Baptism, then, is not only forgiveness but also new life: it signifies purification and new birth in the Holy Spirit, with the principal effects being forgiveness of sins and new birth.¹¹ It is also the first and chief sacrament of the forgiveness of sins, uniting us to Christ who died and rose and giving the Holy Spirit.¹² At the same time, baptism does not erase all weakness—so growth in this “dead to sin” life includes real struggle: “*the grace of Baptism delivers no one from all the weakness of nature... we must still combat the movements of concupiscence.*”¹³

God loves first; we love God first; and from that love comes neighbor-love—lived concretely by cooperating with baptismal grace, living as one who is “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Rooted in the living the Word of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, and utilizing our natural powers the Church has gathered for us teachings within her authority, that make clear what rightly ordered love is and how to live within this order. The early Church Fathers understood rightly ordered love—*ordo amoris*—as the human heart oriented toward its true end: God as the highest good—the ‘summum bonum’, and only then toward created goods and persons—as God wills them. When love is properly ordered, it enables us to perceive things according to their true worth and to act rightly in human relationships and decisions.¹⁴

Our loves become disordered, when we place lesser goods above greater ones. Saint Augustine articulated the *ordo amoris* as an ascending scale: we should love the world’s goods as reflections of God’s creative power, then ourselves as gifts to be offered to God, then our neighbors in a way that demonstrates gospel truth, and finally—supremely—God himself.¹⁵ He imagined the soul’s proper upward gaze as love directed to God who is the unchanging Light—the reality that alone can satisfy the heart without being turned into an idol. In his spiritual reading of the self, he reaches the conviction that we must “*cleave unto God,*” because if we remain not in Him, we cannot “*in [ourselves]*” persist.¹⁶

Saint John Chrysostom emphasized in more detail, this practical shape of rightly ordered love: if love of God is real, it expresses itself through love of neighbor, not only in private piety but in concrete care. He points to Christ’s command as a “sign” of perfect love: “the token of love” is not just saying “I love Him,” but acting accordingly (e.g., tending the sheep).¹⁷ When we invert this hierarchy and elevate something other than God to the center of our lives, we inevitably develop obsessive attachments to whatever idol we’ve chosen to have primary hold on our affections. Rightly ordered love is a deep centering of the will, on

⁵ Mark 12:30-12:31

⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2093

⁷ Mark 12:30-12:31

⁸ 1 John 4:21

⁹ Romans 6:11

¹⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1694

¹¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1262

¹² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 985

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 978

¹⁴ Gerald W. Schlabach, Allan D. Fitzgerald, et al., “Ethics,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 326.

¹⁵ Eric Osborn, “Ethics,” in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino and James Hoover, trans. Joseph T. Papa, Erik A. Koenke, and Eric E. Hewett (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; InterVarsity Press, 2014), 1:849.

¹⁶ Augustine. “The Confessions.” In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 0400.

¹⁷ Chrysostom, John. “On the Priesthood.” In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., ca. 0387.

God. However, not as some kind of formula for the life of a disciple but rather as Saint Athanasius framed it; rightly ordered love as thankful, obedient perseverance: we “offer ourselves to the Lord,” “not to ourselves, but to the Lord Who died for us.” That is a very strong early-Fathers emphasis: love is “rightly ordered” when it moves the center of ownership—life no longer belongs primarily to self, but to Christ.¹⁸

Where does the *ordo amoris* begin? It begins with the words “*we love because he first loved us.*”¹⁹ Because of this love of God for us we can enter the beautiful, transformative mystery of the arc of baptism, which is itself the answer to the questions raised by the readings this weekend. We best love those around us by loving first the one who first loved us. Then, allowing God’s love to come first—received, believed, and inhabited—it overflows outward. St. John also gave us a very concrete test: love isn’t only “in word or speech,” but “in truth and action.”²⁰ We saw this picked up in the teaching of St. John Chrysostom. Through baptism we are meant to be dead to sin and able to love God and neighbor in the rightly ordered manner. A disciple through the grace of adoption is chosen and empowered to be a child of the light whose life is contextualized therefore by rightly ordered love, recognizable insofar as it can be truly said of them that, that they are not wrapped in the darkness of error, but are always standing in the bright light of truth. The scriptural passages establish that through baptism, believers undergo a fundamental reorientation—from slavery to sin toward liberation and adoption into God’s family.

The second reading provides us with Saint Paul’s framework for this baptismal arc which he centers on death to sin’s dominion, enabling believers to reckon themselves alive to God.²¹ This death-and-resurrection pattern involves being buried and raised with Christ through faith in God’s power.²² Yet baptism accomplishes more than just some sort of forensic spiritual cleansing; grace functions as both an ontological elevation and transformation, creating a new connaturality of the soul with divine things that translates into fresh inclination and readiness.²³ The adoption language finds deep resonance in patristic theology. Saint Athanasius understood baptism as uniting humanity with the Godhead—the sacrament through which the divine image is renewed, and the participant becomes an heir of eternal life and adoptive son of the Father.²⁴

Although not every so-called Christian congregation still holds to what has been understood and taught about baptism since the beginning, they cannot, with credibility, deny that ancient Christians experienced baptism as rebirth through which they were adopted by the Father and called to sonship through faith in Christ.²⁵ The light imagery directly parallels Scripture’s own symbolism. Believers transition from darkness to light in the Lord, called to live as children of light whose conduct produces goodness, righteousness, and truth.²⁶ Baptism functions as illumination—the effect of grace by which souls enter into the light, specifically the light of Christ Himself made present through His Spirit.²⁷ This illumination reshapes perception and desire: when one turns from fallenness to contemplate divine values, love awakens and confers new ability to see God, transforming one’s affections from fleshly to divine.²⁸

¹⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria. Letter 5. 329-373.

¹⁹ 1 John 4:19

²⁰ 1 John 3:18

²¹ Romans 6:3–11

²² Col 2:12–13

²³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco; New York: Ignatius Press; Crossroads Publications, 2009), 241–242.

²⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 1977), 431.

²⁵ Angelo Di Berardino and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, Ancient Christian Doctrine* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 5:112.

²⁶ Ephesians 5:8–14

²⁷ Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (London; New York: Burns & Oates, 1976), 145.

²⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco; New York: Ignatius Press; Crossroads Publications, 2009), 241–242.

‘Death to sin’ shows up in daily life less as an absence of temptation and more as a new inner logic and allegiance: sin may still suggest, but it no longer rules. Sin’s rule is rejected, *“Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.”*²⁹ In practice then, death to sin manifests when you stop treating sinful impulses as if they have a right to govern your choices—especially in predictable moments such as involves anger, lust, dishonesty, resentment, despair, revenge, etc. Saint Paul continues with the positive side of the same reality: *“Present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life”* / “present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”³⁰ This is “alive to God” in action: you re-aim your attention, speech, time, and body toward the good.

St. Thomas Aquinas connects being dead to sin to baptism in which believers die with Christ and are transferred to the state of justice, with the body of sin destroyed.³¹ He explains this as being conformed to Christ’s risen life—“never to return” to sin—because you’re incorporated into Christ.³² Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes that Paul says “reckon” because it’s not yet fully visible to the senses, but it is to be lived as real.³³ So daily life includes a repeated act like: ‘This temptation can arise, but it does not get to be my master.’ That is not mere willpower; it’s choosing according to baptismal identity. Baptism effects a real break—but it must be “maintained”. Chrysostom also stresses that baptism makes you dead to sin *“once for all,”* but then your own earnestness must keep it from slipping back: baptism made us dead to it... But this must... continually be maintained.³⁴ So ‘death to sin’ is lived through ongoing cooperation with grace: prayer, sacramental life, confession when needed, and specific resistance to habitual patterns. When your decisions consistently shift from ‘obey passions’ to ‘instruments of righteousness,’ you are witnessing death to sin working itself out in daily life. In short: death to sin manifests whenever you refuse sin’s rulership and actively offer your members to God as you live out baptismal identity.³⁵ This is what it means to love, rightly ordered.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Acedia	Spiritual sloth; one of the interior ways a person can sin against God’s love by refusing to reflect on divine charity.
Baptism	The first and chief sacrament of the forgiveness of sins; it signifies purification, new birth in the Holy Spirit, and incorporation into Christ’s death and resurrection.
Concupiscence	The movement of the “weakness of nature” or the inclination to sin that remains even after the grace of baptism.
Connaturality	A state of the soul created by grace that results in a fresh inclination and readiness toward divine things.
Disordered Love	A redirection of the will away from God toward the self or created goods as the ultimate standard; it is described as an offense that sets itself against God’s love.
Illumination	An effect of grace through baptism by which the soul enters the light of Christ, reshaping perception and transforming affections from fleshly to divine.

²⁹ Romans 6

³⁰ Romans 6

³¹ Commentary on Romans, 6:7

³² Commentary on Romans, 6:11

³³ Homily 11 on Romans, Chap. vi. Ver. 11

³⁴ Homily 10 on Romans, Chap. vi. Ver. 2. therefore, you do not obey sin’s commands anymore. Homily 10 on Romans, Chap. vi. Ver. 2.

³⁵ Romans 6

Ordo Amoris	"Order of Love"; a concept from the Church Fathers where the heart is oriented toward God as the highest good, and toward others only as God wills.
Rightly Ordered Love	A state where God holds the first place in the heart, and all other loves (family, self, neighbor) are derived from and protected by that primary relationship.
Summum Bonum	The "highest good," which is God; the true end toward which the human heart must be oriented to find satisfaction.
Take up the Cross	The act of letting love be purified by God; it involves allowing the divine to reorder the heart and expose false or clutching attachments.