

## Loving what is good

You need to love the good in yourself in order to be able to recognize and love the good in others. This means following your own conscience, respecting your own abilities, and getting in touch with your own needs.

The Lord was useful to himself by taking time out for his own needs at Gethsemane before facing his arrest and trial. We also need to look after our own needs.

*Usefulness to oneself is also usefulness to others, for to be of use to oneself is to be in a state to be of use to others.*

Divine Love and Wisdom 318

You need to turn to the best part of yourself -- the Lord within you -- so you can maintain what is fair and good in your dealings with other people for the benefit of both yourself and them.

## Reflection

Think of people you value and bring to mind the qualities you associate them and how they express these in their life. Reflect on your own life and how you display these qualities too. They must be in you for you to recognise them in others. Thank the Lord for his gift of them to you and others.

# Loving ourselves - in relationships



## Love your neighbour as yourself.

Leviticus 19:18

### First care for self

As the plane's engines were warming up, the flight attendant showed the passengers how to put on the oxygen mask in case of an emergency. "Pull it down from above and pull it over your face -- but make sure you do your own before helping your child's." She was right, you cannot care for others if you don't first care for yourself.

It's the same with all aspects of daily life. We cannot love others if we don't love ourselves. The problem can be one of balance. The Word expresses this balance "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*" [Leviticus 19:18]

We are to love other people as much as and in the same way that we love ourselves. It is ok to love ourselves. It must be because the Lord loves us. We are lovable.

### How to find a balance

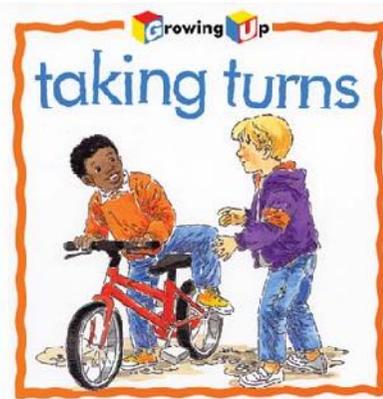
But just how does one do this? We don't choose our neighbours, nor our bosses and work-mates, not even our relatives. Sometimes these people are uncomfortable to live with, difficult to talk to, or they oppose our hopes and aspirations. The challenge is to follow one's own values and beliefs when confronted by different ones from other people. How do you deal with the unwelcome challenge of having to respond to what others want that conflicts with your own interests?

### Taking turns and sharing

Children learn to take turns in throwing the dice in a board game. Adults

resolve difficulties by adopting this approach too; taking turns with friends to pay for a round of drinks in the pub or taking one's turn in the checkout queue at the supermarket.

Children also learn to share things. They might share a toy or share the presence of a parent when hearing a story. Each individual gets a slice of cake as it is shared out. Restaurant staff often share out tips customers have left. You may contribute food for a shared lunch at church. When you come to think of it there are innumerable examples of how people practise sharing.



It is not only children who learn that squabbles can often be sorted by being fair in who gets what and when. It is all part of the spirit of 'give and take' that helps oil the way we rub shoulders with others.

### **Close relationships**

All this might seem a bit too obvious but it also applies to interactions in close relationships. Loving one's partner as oneself means working on the relationship; striving for fairness; and considering the wide range of duties and responsibilities that go to make up a modern marriage. How each partnership negotiates their relationship will differ but the spiritual principle is that each puts something in and each takes something out. And to discover how this works means asking questions. How money for the family is earned. Who does the DIY? the social organizing? the gardening? How are social arrangements made? Who looks after the children and spends time with them? Does each have time to do their own thing? How do you ensure your needs are met as well as your partner's?

### **Neighbours and work colleagues**

When you want one thing and your work colleague or next-door neighbour wants something completely different, how do you go forward fairly? One answer is to try to give time for collaborative discussion. With a bit of searching it sometimes is possible to find something that really suits both of you that wasn't immediately apparent to start with. Hopefully

you and the other person can work together as a team in this way.

### **Fraught relationships**

But what if the relationship is fraught? What if there is a dispute or basic difference of opinion and an unwillingness to co-operate to find original solutions to a problem? How does one 'love the neighbour' who is such a difficult and challenging person to get on with whilst at the same time loving oneself? Collaboration may be a non-starter – after all it takes two to tango and however willing you are to work on the issue the other person may not be.



It is perhaps easier to say what not to do. Not jumping to conclusions about the character of the person. Only judging the behaviour rather than the perpetrator.

Sometimes the most that can be hoped for is a compromise that is second best for each after both sides have negotiated to find a middle ground. But this surely is better than walking away from the person and thus making future communication even more difficult. And certainly better than verbal aggression.

### **The needy person**

Sometimes you might get involved with someone who turns out to be quite needy. It seems that you are doing all the giving and the other person doing all the taking. This can happen at work, with your friends, or even in the family. You seem to be giving more and more of your time to listening to their worries and complaints -- time that you would have spent pursuing your favourite hobby. And when we try to put some limits on what you do for him or her, this person seems very good at pressing your guilt button. You start to dread that phone call or knock on the door.

How can one love this kind of neighbour without becoming burnt out? One answer is to remember that by acquiescing to selfish demands of others this does not help them in the long run. For the church's teaching on charity is that it is the good in the neighbour that we are to love just as we are to love the good in ourselves.