

- 125 years ago today on July 13, 1900, an amazing woman was born into this world: Juana Enriqueta Josefina de los Sagrados Corazones (now known as St. Teresa of the Andes).
- Baptized on the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, St. Teresa of the Andes is the first Carmelite saint from the New World. Sadly, she's not very well known outside her native Chile. Though she died before her 20th birthday, she has much to teach us.
- Teresa was born into a wealthy, loving, and tightly-knit family in Santiago, Chile.
- Her childhood was imbued with a fervent and well-grounded religiosity. St. Teresa grew up with a natural love and curiosity about God, and she longed to know how to get to Heaven.
- Of course, like all of us, St. Teresa had her faults: vanity for one (for she was very beautiful), and anger in particular. So while she had a sweet disposition and was well loved, this young saint could be irascible and given to fits of anger.
- Yet, she was determined to fight against her dominant faults, and under the careful hand of her mother, young Teresa made great progress in subduing her willfulness and anger before being allowed to make her 1st Communion at the age of 10.
- Like a lot of saints, her 1st Holy Communion was a moment of incredible grace for Teresa.
- From the age of 6, Teresa began attending daily Mass. To be well prepared for her 1st Communion, Teresa dutifully strove to overcome those behaviors she knew were displeasing to our Lord, especially her temper.
- At times she really struggled to be good to those whom she didn't like. For example, there was a particular cousin of her mother that Teresa couldn't stand, yet she learned to go out of her way to be always sweet to her – striving to overcome her dominant faults.
- Perhaps it doesn't sound like much, yet being charitable to a person she disliked cost Teresa something. She had to overcome her passions to be sweet and gentle. As she made progress in this from age 9 to 10, her mother eventually agreed to let her make her 1st Communion.
- The night before the big day, Teresa made a general confession – after which she made it a point to go to each member of the household (including the servants) to ask for forgiveness for her sins against them. This turned out to be a very moving event for the family.
- And when she made her 1st Communion the next day, something within her changed.
- She wrote in her diary, “For that first embrace, Jesus did not let me go but took me to Himself.” Her siblings also noticed a change in her. Young Teresa became more gentle, helpful, and obedient, and her good example influenced her siblings to be the same.
- As Teresa matured into a teenager, she began performing both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, teaching catechism to children, and always being generous to the poor.
- Teresa wanted souls to be saved, and she was willing to work for their salvation. Her works of mercy and care for the poor flowed out of her deep love for God and desire to please Him.
- In this, St. Teresa of the Andes is a great model for all of us. She teaches us that loving God should naturally lead us to loving neighbor, and that loving our neighbors is a means of proving our love to God.
- Indeed, we cannot say that we love God as fully as we should if we are not willing to do the hard work of loving our neighbor.
- Yet doing both these things, loving God and loving neighbor, is the very essence of God's law, which is really the point of both our first reading and our Gospel today.

- Our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy provides us with a tidy summary of the Mosaic Law. As he's speaking to us here, Moses has been leading the Israelites through the desert for 40 years, and they're about to enter the Promised Land.
- To prepare them, Moses – who knows he's about to die – pleads with the Israelites to follow God's laws, insisting that they are not at all unknowable or burdensome, but in reality are written upon our hearts. We have only to carry them out, which is important to do.
- To this point, in the Gospel, we have the story of a scholar of the law asking Jesus how one can be saved for eternal life. Jesus responds: "What is written in the law?"
- This is important because salvation is not simply a matter of having faith, as a lot of Protestants contend. When asked about how one is saved, Jesus points to the law, which means we also have to live a life in conformity with God's laws if we hope to be saved.
- Yet this Gospel gets even more interesting when, asked by Jesus to explain the Mosaic law, the scholar neatly distills the 613 Mosaic commands down to the broad commandments of loving God and loving neighbor.
- Jesus affirms the scholar in this answer and rejoins that interpreting all the rest of God's laws must be directed to fulfilling these two most important commandments of charity.
- And then when asked by the scholar: "Who is my neighbor," Jesus then launches into the famous parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Our Christian tradition has always understood the Good Samaritan to be a symbol of Christ, while the man beaten and robbed is a symbol of sinful man – of our broken human condition.
- Of course, in the semitic culture of Jesus' time, the Jews despised Samaritans because they were a mixed race of Israelites and Gentiles who rejected God's covenant and set up a rival place of worship. In a sense, the Jews looked upon Samaritans as schismatics and heretics.
- The priest and the Levite in this parable typify the old Mosaic covenant, and they avoid contact with the beaten man whom they fear may be dead, because contact with a dead body would render them unclean, and thus unable to perform their duties in the Temple.
- Yet, in this way the priest and the Levite fail to fulfill the true heart of God's law, for the prophet Hosea reminds us that God desires mercy, not sacrifice (cf. Hosea 6:6), and thus charitably caring for our neighbor should trump one's duties in the Temple.
- The irony of this parable is that the Samaritan – the schismatic heretic – has a better grasp on the essence of God's law than the priest and the Levite.
- What's more, Jesus changes the nature of discussion from being about who one's neighbor is to a lesson on how to be a neighbor to all those around us, especially those in need of help.
- As the Good Samaritan, Christ rescues us from our fallen state, He bandages the wounds of our sins, being willing to minister to us even despite our uncleanness. Christ, Who knew no sin, is willing to take on our sins to free us from sin.
- In the same way, our love for God should lead us to extending charity to others, regardless of culture, creed, or beliefs, seeing all men as our neighbor.
- If we going to be Christians in word and deed and not simply in name, we must practice charity with everyone, especially those we dislike or find loathsome, with the goal of pleasing our Lord and drawing them closer to God.
- Worthily and regularly receiving the Eucharist, though, gives us all the strength we need to do this. And we must never take for granted this most precious gift.
- And if there is someone in your life you're struggling to love, ask for the grace to do so when you come to Holy Communion. God will give you the grace!

- Brothers and sisters, the heart of God's law is loving Him above all else and our neighbor as ourselves, most especially our difficult neighbors. Like Teresa of the Andes, may we learn to overcome our passions and subdue our pride to love all those we find difficult to love.
- St. Teresa of the Andes, pray for us.