

A Love of First Preference

Jesus is radical and absolute when speaking of his first preference for love. In saying *hating* in today's Gospel, Jesus invites us to place God first in our hearts. And when God is first, we will actually love everyone else more and better. Saint Gregory comments on this passage: "In this world let us love everyone, even though he be our enemy; but let us hate him who opposes us on our way to God, though he be our relative. We should...love our neighbor; we should have charity towards all—towards relatives and towards strangers—but without separating ourselves from the love of God out of love for them" (*Evangelia homiliae*, 37, 3).

Jesus' words mean that we cannot be halfhearted in our love for God or neighbors—even if our neighbor is an enemy. The very nature of love is to put others first, and that first "other" is God himself.

The painting from the Vatican Hall of Saints shows St. Anthony, head of a large monastery, meeting in the desert with St. Paul, a poor hermit who lived off the land. Both represented two ways of totally responding to God's call—one as a religious monk living in a thriving community and another as a hermit, living separated from the world as testimony to what really matters.

Religious brothers and sisters living by the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—as monks, hermits,



Piece: *Encounter Between St. Anthony, Abbot, and St. Paul the Hermit*, 1492-94
Artist: Bernardino Pinturicchio
Location: Vatican Museums, Borgia Apartments

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or other forms of consecrated life—testify to the world that this radical, loving God is first above all things. They deserve our support and our imitation!

—Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

For Reflection

Is there something the Holy Spirit is asking of me so my following of Jesus becomes more sincere and committed?

How do I support religious vocations?

[Jesus said,] "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

Luke 14:27

