

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

Everywhere in the world and in many ways, people talk about love. Love is a magic word that thrills the hearts of many; but it bleeds also the hearts of others because of the experience of the past. Whatever might be our opinion on this subject, there are questions each one of us has to answer: What is the true meaning of love? Who shall we love? Why shall we love? How shall we love?

The readings of this Sunday answer these questions by showing us that God is the measure of human love. It would be false, however, to pretend to love God and to hate our fellow humans; we can only love both and vice versa.

In the first reading, Moses reminds the people of Israel of the importance of God's commandments. He emphasizes that the law of God is not far away. God has written it in the heart of each one. For that reason, each one can discern from his own conscience the good from the bad.

Moses insists also on the fact that God's law is not mysterious or beyond human reach. It is very near and in the mouth and the heart of every human being. The reason for that is that what God wants is also what our heart demands. If we were not blinded by passion and sin, we would choose what is right and according to the will of God. We make wrong decisions because we rely on our own arguments and we do not listen to the voice of our conscience.

This reading helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus deals with the law of love. First of all, we have a doctor of the law who comes to Jesus and inquires about the way of inheriting eternal life. His answer to Jesus' question about the law is correct, because we have to love God with all our heart, with all our being, with all our strength, with all our mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

As stated, this commandment has a real practical consequence. It is here that the doctor of the law feels really uncomfortable. In fact, for the Jews, the non-Jews as well as the enemies of Israel were not regarded as neighbors. That is why, he bluntly retorts to Jesus: "Who is my neighbor"? In other words, he wants to know how far love should take him.

By giving the example of a pagan Samaritan who helped the unfortunate man on the road, Jesus invites us to destroy the barriers that divide people and exclude them from one another. The real problem is not to know how far we should go with our love, but how we can manifest it in a way it embraces both God and our fellows.

For Jesus, anyone in need is our neighbor. For that reason, our help must be as wide as is the love of God for us. Our concern must be practical and not just consisting in feeling sorry. It is true that the priest and Levite felt sorry for the wounded man, but they did nothing to help. True compassion must result in deeds. That is why what Jesus said to the Scribe, he says to us: "Go and do likewise". Be a neighbor to the person in need and you will inherit eternal life.

With this parable Jesus is affirming the primacy of practice over knowledge, that of compassion over religious customs. The scribe knew well the heart of the Law, but he could not put it into practice, because of prejudices. The priest and the Levite saw well the wounded man, but passed over to the other side of the road because of the respect of their religious customs. True religion is that of the heart and not just that based on rituals.

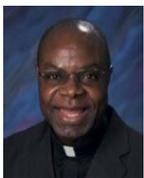
What we learn also is that in religion, the game of an alibi is more dangerous than helpful. One thousand and one tricks keep us away from concrete problems of people and lock up our religion in the abstract. Many prefer to love in general than to love concrete people who are around them. We have compassion for people we see suffering on television, but we do not care for those who suffer around us. But what can God do with a religion that escapes the concrete problems of people to pass over to the other side of the road?

This parable challenges each one of us at the very heart of our commitment in the world. It challenges parents who do not parent, teachers who do not teach, students who do not study, ministers who do not minister, and politicians who do not care for the common good. It challenges us as Christians when we do not perform the work of Christ in loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The last thing we learn from the parable is that the love of God goes hand in hand with the love of our fellow humans. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor. In the same way, we cannot love our neighbor without loving God. Spirituality without humanism is a dead end; humanism without God is dangerous. Our faith in Jesus Christ teaches us that all human beings are God's children. Because he loves them all, we have to love them all. It would be contradictory to love parents but exclude their children.

Because God loves everybody without discrimination, we have to love our fellows beyond the boundary of race, color, nation and language. Otherwise we will confine our love to those we like, and eventually behave like the priest and the Levite. Being a Good Samaritan requires a faith that tells us that all people are children of our heavenly Father and for that reason, they deserve our love.

Let us then ask Christ, the wisdom of the Father, to give us his deep feelings so that we come to the same compassion he has for the people he met on his way. Let us ask him to give us the same love that he has for those who approached him. Let him teach us that a neighbor is not necessarily somebody next door, or people we like, but anyone who needs us. May God bless each one of you and bless you in all you do for your brothers and sisters in imitating God's compassion and love.



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Deuteronomy 30, 10-14c; Colossians 1, 15-20; Luke 10, 25-37