

Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time B2021

The readings of this Sunday talk about the love of God and the love of our neighbor. They show us that the love of God and the love of neighbor go hand in hand. Therefore, it would be impossible to be faithful to God if we are unfaithful to the cause of our fellows.

In the first reading Moses reminds the people of Israel of their commitment and duties toward God. It shows his appeal to them that they fear God and keep his commandments while he will bless them with a long life and a beautiful land. It shows also how they have to love God with all the organs of their body and take to heart his commandments and statutes.

What is behind this text is the idea of obeying God as an exclusive and unique partner in his relationship with his people. There is also the idea that when the people of God remain faithful to the spirit of the covenant, God reward them and cover all their spiritual and material needs.

This text helps understand the point of today's Gospel, as Jesus answers the question of the Scribe by circumscribing the heart of the Law to the love of God and neighbors.

First of all, the Gospel speaks of a Scribe who asked Jesus about what was the greatest of the commandments. Then, it gives the answer of Jesus who summarizes the law in the love of God and the love of neighbors.

After that, it shows the approval of the Scribe who acknowledged that the love of God with all the organs of our human body and the love of neighbor were more important than all the offerings that someone can bring before God. Finally, the Gospel shows the approval of Jesus who acknowledged the righteousness of the Scribe's answer by pointing out that by he was not far from the Kingdom of God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the precedence of love over duties. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In today's Gospel, Jesus answers the question of the Scribe by referring him to the love of God and neighbor as the greatest of the commandments. In reaction the Scribe declared that to love God and to love the neighbor is "worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices". I want to deepen these two sides of the law of love.

When Jesus says that the greatest of the commandments is to love God with the whole heart, soul, mind and strength, he is indicating to us that if we want to belong to God we have to surrender to him completely and entirely. Jesus is appealing to us so that we give to God the totality of what we are and to let ourselves be transformed by his love. He wants that nothing of us might be left outside of the love of God.

In biblical usage the word 'heart' plays a big role. The heart is the central organ of our being from where arise our thoughts, memories, decisions, and deepest feelings. Feelings that are associated more directly with our physical or bodily needs (we call sometimes 'gut reactions') are associated with other internal organs, not the heart.

When Jesus says to love God with all our heart, he invites us to give priority to God in all our thoughts, words and decisions. He wants our heart to be pure, that is, to be so clear that the face of God is always, as it were, reflected in it. If our heart is pure, then our thoughts and decisions and feelings will be good. If our heart is rotten, what comes from our heart will have the stench of sin about it.

One of the dilemmas we face, however, is the discovery that we are divided human beings, even in our ultimate choices. The simple measure we can give in this regard is about what happens to us when we go to the stores to buy a dress, a shirt or a suit. It takes us time before we decide on which of those things we fix our mind.

The Lord does not want us to love him with a divided heart, but rather completely and undividedly. God does not want us to love him as an object among many others, alongside the things of this world, but as someone to whom we give all we are, all we have, all our heart, all our mind, all our strength. We have to fix our being on him and to give ourselves exclusively to him.

Why shall we do so? We have to do so because we are made for God and to love him is to return to what makes us who we are as God's children. Moreover, God is love. If it is so, by loving him we just return to our own very being, as we are created in his image.

Plus, we cannot love him without loving our neighbor. Just as we are made for God, we are made for one another. For that reason, there is no spirituality without humanism and there is no humanism without God. To support one and to reject the other, and vice versa, is a contradiction.

We can only love God and our fellows at the same time. That is why we should not neglect the fate of our fellows with whom we live. We cannot care for the things of God and neglect the things of this world. This is not socialism, but rather the heart of Christian teaching. It is a shame that some people politicize this truth.

The consequence to draw from such a vision is that the fulfillment of our duties in society and in the Church should always be evaluated with regard to the law of love. Otherwise we would be simply satisfied with what we do even if it does not correspond to the love of God and neighbor. I take this point from the suggestion made in the Gospel that to love God and the neighbor is worth more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Offerings and sacrifices are important, but fulfilling them without love in heart does not help us. Without examining this question, we run the risk of doing things just because that is a requirement. There is a difference between fulfilling a duty as a requirement and doing it because of love. In that sense, if we offer something, we do it as an expression of our love of God. If we give something for the needy, we do it as a consequence of our concern for the wellbeing of our fellows. May God help us love him by loving our brothers and sisters! Let us ask him to give us the courage to love him through by loving our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Deuteronomy 6: 2-6; Hebrews 7: 23-28; Mark 12: 28b-34



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