

THIRTHIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR A/2005

When looking at animal channels or observing animals' life in the forest, one of the most striking facts is that the "law of the jungle" is their main rule and their code of conduct. The law of the jungle means that only the strongest can survive competition, danger and threat coming from their predators. As strange as it could be, the law of the jungle does not apply only to animals' world; it takes also in human relationship and in society many forms like the exploitation of the poor, the oppression of the aliens, the despise of the widows and the orphans. Today's readings try to bring before us so all these phenomena of society as to teach us how we should conduct according to the will of God, our Father.

In the 1st reading, unlike many nations of its time, Israel has been given a severe legislation that bade its citizens not to do any injustice or discrimination to the strangers, the poor and the weak. The reason for such a sensibility lies in the fact that the people of Israel have lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. Therefore, remembering how worse was their suffering and how the Lord has saved them, they should be open to others and compassionate. In other words, each of us is invented to do a flash back of his life, to see where he comes from and what the Lord has done for him; then, considering all that to be kind, generous and openhearted towards the needy, the poor, the widows and the orphans.

The reason why God cares for this category of people is that, given their fragility, they are without protection, without husband or parents, and thus can easily fall victims of every type of abuse. In this perspective, God alone is their protector and defender. Consequently, to harm them is like to harm God himself who is their Father and their guardian. This is why God forbids taking interest on loans and recommends avoiding anything that will cause suffering to these people. So is he very sensitive to their cries and tears, to their requests for help, because he is merciful.

This text allows us to understand the stake of today's Gospel. Jesus places on the same level the love of God and the love of humans. Whoever fulfils the commandment of love has already fulfilled all the law. All the rest is just comment and explanation. The love of God whose question is here does not mean to give him some of our times in the day through celebration and prayer or to offer him our offerings; there is more than that. To love God means to give us entirely to him so that there is no parcel of ourselves that is out of his control. It is to rely completely on him in everything we undertake and plan. It is to live and act in such a way that our heart, our mind and our soul are set in fire by his words and his degree. This is what it means to love with the all heart, all soul and all mind.

However, to make this love of God visible and touchable, one must show it through our concern for our fellowmen and women. In this context, the love of our brothers and sisters becomes a ground where we practice the love of God. This is the reason why Jesus does not to separate the love of God and the love of the neighbor. God

and the neighbor are both two sides of a same coin in so far as in every person God is present. Some Christians argue that the most import for them is to go to church. Therefore, they should be spared about the message on the poor and the needy. What matters them most is just God and they and nobody else. Here they obey the first grand commandment and forget the second. Other Christians operate on social worker principals. They put out for the poor not because it pleases God, but because it makes them feel good. The teacher is squeezed out of the package. They obey the second commandment and disregard the first. Such people are humanitarian but not really Christians.

Loving God and loving neighbor sum up the law and the prophets. This is not something over and above our daily lives. It is the fabric of our lives. It is that which makes us who we are. Loving God and the neighbor is the heart of our daily lives, the springboard of our actions, the basis of our decisions, the reason for our prayer life, the motivation of our lifestyle. Which commandment is the greatest then? The commandment to be close to God that we become his presence for others.

There is a story about a woman who was in great distress because she had loss a sense of things in her life. “Why does not God let me feel his presence?” she cried. “If only I could feel him and know that he has touched me”. Her elderly grandmother, to whom she was complaining summoned: “Pray to God, right now. Close your eyes and pray to him. Ask him to put out his hand and touch you”. The girl closed her eyes and prayed fervently. Then she felt a hand on her hand. “He touched me. He touched me”, she cried out. Then she said, “You know, his hand felt just like your hand”. “Of course it was my hand”, her grand mother said. “That is how God works. He takes the hand that is nearest and uses that”.

That is what God does. He looks to see what is available. Is it your hand? Is it my hand? He uses that hand to touch people. “Love God with your whole heart and mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself”. When our lives are focused on loving God, we become vehicles of his love to others. To love God it is necessary to be always attentive and ready to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters. This is much more taxing than the observance of some norms or prescriptions. We ask God to help us to love him by loving one another.



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