

15th Sunday of Ordinary time C/2007

Many times we have heard people talking about love in various circumstances. Love has become a magic word on the lips of the young people, as well as on that of the old. It is so widely used, and at times misused, that we wonder what true sense it still has. But, who shall we love? Why shall we love and how shall we love? Today's readings try to answer these questions by showing us that the love of God is inseparable from the love of our fellow humans, that we cannot love God and neglect our fellows.

In the first reading, Moses reminds the people that the law of God, including the law of love, is written in our hearts. For that no one can say that he does not know what God expects from him, because he can always discern from his conscience what is good and bad.

In fact, the law of God is neither mysterious nor beyond the reach of humans; it is very near, in the mouth and the heart of every human. What God wants from us is also what our hearts demand. If we were not blinded by passion and sin, we would always choose what is right and according to the will of God. We make wrong decisions precisely because, relying on our false arguments, we put aside the voice of our hearts.

The Samaritan of the Gospel though considered an unbeliever by the Jews, has listened to his conscience and shown more love of his fellow human being than the pretended religious men who were the priest and the Levite. First of all, the Gospel displays a doctor of the law who asks Jesus about the way of attaining eternal life. His answer to the question of Jesus about the law, namely that "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself*", is right and summarizes the whole of the Law. However, this statement has a real consequence. It means that independently of race, nation or religion; regardless of intellectual or cultural background, we have to treat everyone as we would like to be treated.

It is here that the problem becomes difficult, because for the Jews, the non-Jews, as well as the enemies of Israel could not be neighbors. For instance, some of them said that it was illegal to help a Gentile woman at her time of child birth, for that would only have been to bring another Gentile into the world. So, we can understand why the scribe's retort 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 helps the unfortunate man on the road, Jesus invites us to destroy the barriers between person and person, people and people. The problem is not now to know how far we should extend our love, but how it can be manifested and who really loves God and the fellow.

For Jesus, anyone from any nation who is in need is our neighbor. For that, our help must be as wide as the love of God. Our concern must be practical and not just consist in feeling sorry. It is true that the priest and Levite had pity for the wounded man, but they did nothing for him. True compassion must result in

deeds. That is why what Jesus said to the Scribe, he says to us: “Go and do likewise”. Be 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 had trouble to put it into practice, because of prejudices. The priest and the Levite saw well the wounded man, but passed over the other side of the road because 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 alibis 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 suffer 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, 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 together with the love of our fellow humans. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor, or inversely to love our neighbor without loving God. A piety without humanism is a dead end, as well as humanism without God is dangerous. The insight of faith tells that all human beings are God’s children. He loves them all. We cannot love parents and exclude their children from our love. Otherwise we will be in trouble.

The love of God must motivate us to love beyond boundaries of race, color, nation and preferences; otherwise we will confine our love to those we like, and eventually behave like the priest and the Levite in today’s parable. Being a good Samaritan requires a faith that tells us that all people are children of our heavenly Father and for that they deserve our love.

Let us then ask of Christ the wisdom of the Father to give us his deep feelings so that we have the same compassion that he has for the people he met on his way, and the same love that he has for those who approached him. Let him teach us that a neighbor is not necessarily someone 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.



Homily Date: July 15, 2007
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20070715homily.pdf

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