

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's love as inseparable from the love of our fellow humans. In the first reading, the book of Exodus gives to the people of Israel the stipulations that had to regulate their social relationships with the most vulnerable members of the society, namely the aliens, the widows, the orphans and the poor.

The reason why the Israelites had to act this way with charity and compassion towards this group of people is, first of all, because they too were foreigners in Egypt. At that time, as they cried to God, he listened to them and delivered them from slavery. Moreover, all human beings are created in the image of God. In that sense, any harm done to them would be as though it was done to God himself. Therefore, the Israelites cannot make the most vulnerable members of the society suffer from their hand without God's reaction.

What this text brings to our attention is that we do not become blind with regard to God's bounty and generosity toward us. In fact, God has bestowed upon us many blessings for which we have to be grateful to him. If that is the case, we have to become, in turn, a blessing also to others, especially the needy.

This vision helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is talking about the commandment of Love that has to be directed not only to God, but also extended to the neighbors.

The starting point of Jesus vision is a question that the Pharisees asked him about the greatest of the commandments in the Law. In response, Jesus refers to the teaching of the book of Deuteronomy (6: 5) that recommends loving God with the whole heart, the whole soul and the whole mind as the greatest of the commandments. However, God's love would be partial, incomplete and a mere slogan if it was not extended to our fellows. That is why Jesus recalls Leviticus 19:18 by reminding his interlocutors that besides loving God, they have to love their neighbor as themselves.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing Jesus teaches us is that life is love. The fact that Jesus reduces the content of all the commandments to love means that life in itself is love. In fact, any law, whether civil or religious, is given so that by respecting it, people may have a good life and live freely, happily and abundantly. In that sense, to fully live means to love. As human experience has shown us, when we stop loving, life becomes full of hatred, bitterness, rancor and revenge. It is only when we love that we give life a chance and we can explore its possibilities and its potential.

At the same time, it means that love becomes our duty, as disciples of Jesus. We cannot live without loving. We have to love God; we have to love our fellows. We have to love our friends and our enemies; our families and the aliens. Whatever might be the people, we have to love them; whatever might be the conditions, we have to do it; because it is our duty. This duty is for the whole of our life until its end. This is a duty without vacation or break. Not loving is like to stop breathing, because love is our breath.

The second thing we learn is that because life is love, it is in our interest to love first God, the creator of that life. How can we love life without loving the one who has given

us that life? In that perspective, we understand why Jesus says that the first of the commandment is to love God. That is why it would be a contradiction to desire to live, but at the same time to reject God. As St John says, “love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4: 7-8).

The third thing we learn is about the way of loving. In fact, we cannot love God halfway, but totally, completely and entirely. That is why Jesus says that we have to love with all the heart, all the soul and all the mind. The heart, the soul and the mind are an expression of the whole person. What it means is that nothing of us should be put aside or left out when it is about loving God. What it means also is that we have to live and act in such a way that our heart, our mind and our soul are completely given to God.

Another thing we learn is about the unity of God and human beings. In fact, it is impossible to love God and to hate our fellows, because the love of God and the love of our fellows go together. In that perspective, our fellows become the ground where we practice the love of God. That is why Jesus did not to separate the love of God and the love of the neighbor. Rather, he made God and the neighbor stand together as two sides of the same coin because God is present in each person he has created.

In that sense, there is no spirituality without humanism as well as there is no humanism without God. Any spirituality that does not care for the fate of our fellow human beings, including the needy, the poor, the widows, the aliens, is just a fake one. In the same way, any humanism that does not care of God becomes destructive of human beings, because in the end it becomes a denial of God who gives us the dignity of being created in his image.

The last thing we learn is about the primacy of unselfishness over selfishness. Jesus puts it in a way that says that the way we love ourselves should be the measure we use for our fellows. Therefore, the way we treat ourselves should be the way we treat others. The way we deal with ourselves should be the way we deal with others. The measure we use for ourselves should be the measure we use for others.

Let us pray that the Lord may help us to internalize the commandment of love in our lives and in our relationships with our fellows. Let us ask him to give us the courage to work for him by working for our brothers and sisters. May God bless you all!

Exodus 22: 20-26; 1 Thessalonians 1: 5c-10; Matthew 22: 34-40



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