

## Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

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 for us to be faithful to God if we are unfaithful to the cause of our fellows.

In the first reading of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of Israel of their commitment and duty toward God. If they fear God and keep his commandments, he will bless them with a long life and a beautiful land. For that reason, they have to love God with all the cells of their life 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 if the people of God remain faithful to the spirit of covenant, God will reward them and cover all their spiritual and material needs.

This text helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as Jesus answers the question of the Scribe by stating that the heart of the Law is the love of God and the love of our neighbors.

First of all, the Gospel says that as a Scribe asked Jesus the question of knowing what was the greatest of the commandments, Jesus reminded him that it was to love God with the whole of our being. He also added that such love would not make sense if it did not include the love of our fellows. That is why he said that the second greatest of the commandments was to love our neighbor as we do ourselves.

Touched by Jesus' answer, the scribe acknowledged that the love of God with all the cells of our human body and the love of neighbor were more important than all the offerings that someone can bring before God. Jesus, in turn, acknowledged the righteousness of the Scribe's answer by pointing out that by giving such an interpretation of the law, he was not far from the Kingdom of God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the importance of surrendering ourselves to God entirely. 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.

In fact, one of the dilemmas we face on a daily basis is that of discovering 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.

God does not want us to love him with a divided heart, but rather completely and absolutely. 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 our whole heart, our mind and 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, it means that 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. It is for that reason that there is no spirituality without humanism as well as 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 politicize this truth.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the danger of being satisfied with the fulfillment of our duties. 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. In fact, as human beings, we are men and women of duty. There are many duties we have to fulfill for our country, for our families, for ourselves, for our business, etc. Anytime people, including myself, have fulfilled their duty, they feel satisfaction and contentment. Sometimes, we easily and proudly say: I made it; it is over now; I can have some rest.

To fulfill one's duty is certainly important and even required if we do not want to appear negligent and lazy people. Each one of us, indeed, should be capable of fulfilling one's duty without pretense or laziness. In some circumstances, to fulfill our duty is even the measure of our commitment and the expression of our character. And it may be true that people sometimes judge us by the way we fulfill our duties.

But, here is the quiz: why do we fulfill such a duty? What drives us in the fulfillment of that duty? My point is this: although the fulfillment of our duty is important and beneficial to us and to others, we better also examine the motivation that leads us. If we don't care about what animates us, we run the risk of doing everything because that is our job. There is a big difference between fulfilling a duty because it is a job and fulfilling a duty because of the love we have for our country, our family or our business, etc.

The point is not the condemnation of offerings and sacrifices as though they were not important. The problem is that, though they are important, they should be the consequence of the love we have for God and our fellows. 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.

With that in mind, let us pray that God may help us to understand that we cannot love him by neglecting to love our fellows. Let us ask him for the courage to love him through the love 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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