

Fifteenth Sunday day in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of the law of love. They show that the love of God is inseparable from the love of our fellows. They invite us to renew our love of God by loving our brothers and sisters.

The first reading reminds the people of Israel, through the mouth of Moses, of the great obligation they had to love God, to keep his commandments and to put his word into practice. It also reminds them of the importance of human conscience as that inner sense whose task is to keep them in the right path of God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the measure of human love. There is also the idea that God's commandments are a source of blessing for those who keep them. The last idea is related to the truth that what God wants is already written in human heart so that by listening to the voice of our conscience we can know God's ways.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus deals with the law of love. First of all, the Gospel speaks of a doctor of the law who came to Jesus to inquire about the possibility of eternal life.

Then, it talks about Jesus' reaction to his question and the answer the doctor gave by summarizing the whole law under the love of God and the neighbor. The Gospel talks also about Jesus' response and the reaction of the scholar who, willing to justify himself, wanted to know who the neighbor was.

After that, the Gospel gives the reaction of Jesus with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Gospel ends up with Jesus' invitation to the scholar to do the same as the Samaritan did.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the necessity of practicing what we hear. First of all, let me tell you the story of a man whose wife had a hearing problem. The man told his wife, "Darling, I am proud of you". As the woman did not hear very well, she just said, "Ok; I am tired of you too".

In fact, the problem of hearing is very important nowadays as it was in the past. It can be rendered this way: What do we hear? How do we hear? From where do we hear? With which faculties do we hear, with our heads or with our hearts, etc?

From the Old Testament, the problem of hearing was already the focus of many prophets. In today's first reading, Moses summarizes it very simply: "If only you would heed the voice of the Lord".....!

In fact, there are many ways of hearing, namely hearing for a simple delight, meaning without any particular objective. This is the case of listening to the music, for example. There is also, hearing for simply knowing the positions of someone on some issues. This would be like in the case of listening to a message from a political campaigner without necessarily intending to vote him. Finally, there is the hearing for acting. Such a hearing prompts a decision to make, a resolve to do something, a determination to carry out some actions, because we have been touched by what we have heard.

This type of hearing is what Jesus asked of the doctor of the law when he said: "Go and do likewise". At the first glance, indeed, it seems that the scholar knew the law very well. And his answer to Jesus is correct because we have to love God with all our heart, with all our being, with all our strength, with all our mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

However, the content of this law has a practical consequence. And it is here that the scholar failed the test. In fact, for the Jews, the pagans and the non-Jews were not considered as neighbors, but rather as enemies. That is the reason why the scholar bluntly retorted to Jesus: “Who is my neighbor”?

In other words, he wanted to know how far love should take him. By giving the example of a pagan Samaritan who helped the unfortunate man on the road, Jesus invites us to destroy the barriers that divide us and exclude us one from another. He affirms the primacy of practice over knowledge, that of compassion over religious customs. He also invites us to the practice of true religion, which is that of the heart and not externally based on simple rituals.

In that sense, the real problem is not to know how far we should go with our love, but how we can manifest it in a way it embraces both God and our fellows. For Jesus, indeed, anyone in need is our neighbor. For that reason, our help must be as wide as is the love of God for us. Our concern must be practical and not just consisting in feeling sorry. It is true that the priest and Levite felt sorry for the wounded man, but they did nothing to help.

True compassion, indeed, does not consist in just feeling sorry, but in initiating concrete acts. In fact, many people prefer to love in the abstract rather than to love concrete people who are around them. They have compassion for the suffering they see on television, but they do not care for those who suffer around them. But what can God do with a religion that escapes the concrete problems of people?

The parable of the Good Samaritan challenges each one of us at the very heart of our commitment in the world. It challenges parents, teachers, students, politicians, priests, etc. It challenges us as Christians when we do not perform the work of Christ in loving our fellows as ourselves.

The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us that the love of God goes hand in hand with the love of our fellow humans. That is why we cannot love God without loving our fellows as well as we cannot love our neighbors without loving God. In truth, spirituality without humanism is a dead end and humanism without God is dangerous.

In order to be a Good Samaritan, we have to understand that all people are the children of God. Therefore, they deserve our love and our help. Let us pray, then, that Jesus may give us the same love that he had for those who approached him. May he teach us that anybody in need is our neighbor! May he help us put into practice his word we have heard! God bless you all!

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



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