

## **Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017**

The readings of this Sunday talk about Christian morality. They show that the foundation of Christian Ethics is the law of love. They invite us to imitate God in all our actions and to love as he does.

The first reading describes God's recommendation to Moses that the people of Israel imitate him in holiness. It also shows God's prohibition to them to practice hatred, revenge and grudge. Finally, it highlights the importance of the law of love.

What is behind this text is the idea that the uniqueness of Christian ethics stems out of our relation with God. Another idea is that those who belong to God have to imitate him in their behavior. The last idea is related to the truth that the backbone of Christian ethics is the law of the love of God and the neighbor.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus gives the principles of right conduct to his disciples. First of all, the Gospel reports the speech of Jesus in which he contrasts the law of proportionality with that of passive resistance; that of violence with that of no-revenge and proposes to practice generosity toward the needy.

Second, the Gospel describes the statement of Jesus with regard to the love of neighbor and enemies and the necessity of praying for our persecutors instead of hating them or taking revenge.

Finally, the Gospel gives the reason why Jesus invites his disciples not to take revenge by referring to God who is holy, perfect, merciful and generous, and those who follow God have to imitate him in everything.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about Christian ethics. I call ethics the art of the right conduct that defines what is good to do and what is bad to avoid. This art is regulated by the laws and the rules, which are primarily written in the human conscience so that, each one by following it can act morally in a responsible way.

That is why in every society in the world people can determine the good from the bad and act accordingly by following their conscience. This reference to human conscience helps understand what we call natural law by which it is assumed that human beings have the capacity of distinguishing right from wrong and thereby are morally responsible.

However, the recognition of human conscience is not enough because it can be easily obscured by passion and emotion. Moreover, besides the fact that there is the risk of making moral principles simply subjective, there is also the risk of making one's passion and emotion the measure of justice. If that is the case, then, each person would do himself justice anytime there is a conflict or a rapist would justify his bad acts by referring to his conscience. That is one of the reasons why societies have come to the idea of regulating the moral behavior of its citizens through coded laws.

In order to prevent vengeance and retaliation, Israel, like many societies of their time, had adopted the law of proportionality. That Law stipulated that the punishment to be given in case of bad behavior should be proportionate to the committed fault. That explains the maxim "eye for eye" and "tooth for tooth".

An examination of that principle shows, however, that instead of establishing justice, the law of proportionality is, in fact, a type of permitted revenge. Why? Because if one who broke the leg of another has to have his own leg broken, what kind of justice is it?

It is here that today's Gospel makes sense. For Jesus, indeed, the human conscience cannot be an exclusive foundation of moral law, but rather God because, as an ultimate reality, he is objective. Moreover, because God is forgiveness and mercy, those who believe in him have to play the card of no-resistance, no-revenge, and no-retaliation with regard to those who harm them.

Furthermore, because God is love, those who believe in him have to imitate him in his perfection. That is why he insists on loving the enemies and praying for the persecutors.

Is this demand of Jesus unrealistic? No. Let me explain. In fact, in order to enter Jesus' vision, we have to distinguish what we call filial love from marital love. What is that? Filial love is that which exists between children and their parents, and the marital love is what exists between the spouses. The feeling that drives the filial love is affection. It is deeply rooted in the human heart so that no one can help loving his own children. The feeling that drives the marital love is passion. It is rooted in the human heart to the point that no one can help falling in love.

When Jesus talks about the love of enemies, it is not filial or marital love. Unlike those, the love of enemies is an act of the will. One needs a little bit of goodwill in order for it to happen. One has to bring in not only one's heart, but also one's head, so that it might be conquered over the natural instinct of resentment against the enemies.

The question to raise here would be that of knowing why we should love our enemies and pray for our persecutors? First of all, there is the example of God himself. He does not make a distinction between the criminal and the innocent. He makes the sun rise on the bad and the good alike. He causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust. In that sense, those who believe in him should behave like him and imitate him.

Second, there is the problem of the truth about ourselves. In fact, as human beings, we all make mistakes toward others and, even, we sin against God. However, we all want people to forgive us, as well as we want God to grant us his mercy. If that is the case, we should do the same thing with our enemies.

Third, there is the problem of the difference between us and the pagans. As Jesus said, people should look at our deeds and glorify God. If our deeds cannot be different from those of pagans, then, there is a problem with our faith. That is why Jesus wants us to be different and act differently.

Let us ask Jesus to let us understand that we are the temple of God. And for that reason, we have to imitate our Father in heaven by loving our enemies and persecutors. God bless you all.

**Leviticus 19: 1-12, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 3: 16-23; Matthew 5: 38-48**



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