

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of the Law of love. They show that the love of God cannot be separated from the love of our fellow human beings. They invite us to love one another as God loves us.

The first reading talks about the respect of social Laws. It invites the people of Israel to have always in memory their past experience of suffering in Egypt as their guide in dealing with others. It reminds them of the importance of the gratuity of their gestures in daily life in imitation of God who was generous and compassionate with them.

What is behind this text is the idea that for those who believe in God, benevolent reciprocity should be the rule of life. There is also the idea that gratuity is the mark of our belonging to God. The last idea is related to the truth that what we do to others is done to God himself.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel in which Jesus talks of the inseparability of the love of God and the love our fellows. The Gospel starts with a question asked Jesus by a scholar of the law over the greatest of commandments. Then, it gives the answer of Jesus who cites the love of God as the greatest of the commandments. After that, it gives the love of neighbor as second to the love of God. The Gospel ends with Jesus claiming that the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the law of Love. Before entering into deep, I want to share with you some findings I discovered as I was searching on the subject. In fact, as I was searching, I found that "love" is one of the most used words in the Contemporary world. But, it is also one of the most misused in human language.

Some people define love as a feeling or emotion, others as a decision based upon the will and not just an emotion based upon physical attraction, etc. I do not know which one is true. What I know with certitude, however, is that as one of the most used words, love is found everywhere, on internet, in movies, on television, in books. The way it functions seems as though it was an emotion or a feeling that can affect actions and decisions.

But, when the Bible talks about love, it is above all a command, a rule of conduct. In such circumstances, when Jesus talks about loving God with all heart, with all soul, and will all mind and loving the neighbor as ourselves, what does he mean?

First, when Jesus commands us to love God in this way, he means that we desire him above all things and make our relationship with him the highest priority of our life. It means also to make God the center around which all our existence revolves. Finally, it means to open up to him in such a way that all the fibers of our being are reserved for God alone. In that sense, heart, soul and mind signify the totality of our being that has to be given to God.

Moreover, by commanding us to love God in such a way, Jesus 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 simplest 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.

Here is a question: can we really love God that way? Yes, we can. For instance, we spend a lot of time thinking about the things we desire or the persons we cherish. And when we treasure something or someone, it is he or she who occupies our mind all the time. In the same way, if we treasure God, he has to occupy our heart, soul and mind all the times so that he becomes the center of the whole of our life. That is what Jesus desires and wants for us.

Now, here is a problem. That love of God goes hand in hand with the love of our fellows. It is impossible to pretend loving God while hating 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 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 people politicize this truth.

Notice also that loving our neighbor includes sharing with the poor and alien; having compassion, honesty and justice in our relationship with others; never put another life at risk and never taking revenge. Everything we want to be done to us, we should do it to others. Everything we do not want to be done to us, we should not do to others.

In a very simple way, it is clear that this commandment of Jesus is not about building walls in order to keep those we see as undesirable out, but rather building bridges so as to welcome the alien, refugee, and the persecuted. We are sometimes quick at rejecting the messenger who calls on us to open our hearts to all our neighbors. But, while rejecting the messenger who challenges us is easy, it does not change the reality of this teaching of Jesus.

That is why we have always to remember that the love of our neighbor is profoundly influenced by our love of God. If we love God, we have to think about our fellow human being in need. The other person is not loved because he is attractive or beautiful, or because he speaks my language without accent, or has the same color of skin like me, but because he is a child of God like me.

After all, God did not love the Hebrew slaves in Egypt because they were beautiful or cultivated, or spoke the same language with him, but simply because he is good and they were in desperate need. Such unconditional love is what we have to show to others. Let us pray, then, that God may help us understand that we cannot love him without loving our fellows. Let us ask him for the courage to love him by loving 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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