

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

I want to start this homily by referring to the animal world. As a matter of fact, when I visit animals' parks or watch the animals' TV channel, it is striking to realize that their rule of life and their code of conduct is the "Law of the jungle". The law of the jungle means that only the strongest can survive. Competition, danger and threat come from everywhere, from one predator to another.

Unfortunately, the law of the jungle does not apply only to animals' world. Today, it has also entered human relationship under the form of exploitation of the poor and the weak, oppression of the aliens and those who are not like us, despise of the widows and rejection of the orphans. God wants us think about those things this Sunday in the light of the Law of the love of God and our neighbor.

In the book of Exodus, God prohibits Israel to oppress the alien, to do harm to the widow and the orphan, to exploit the needy and the poor, and to act unjustly toward the neighbor. They should act this way, because, they too were strangers, poor and weak in Egypt. Therefore, they should remember the state in which they were in Egypt, appreciate what God did by delivering them and be compassionate, kind and generous towards the needy, the poor, the widows and the orphans.

Here is a question: "Why is God caring so much for this category of peoples? The reason is that given their fragility, they are without protection and without resources, without husband and without parents, and thereby, can easily become victims of every type of abuse. In that perspective, God alone is their protector and defender. Consequently, to harm them is like to harm God himself who is their Father and their guardian.

Such a vision helps us understand why the love of God cannot go without the love of our fellow human beings. It is for the reason same that Jesus places on the same level the love of God and the love of fellows. Whoever fulfils the commandment of love has already fulfilled the whole law. All the rest is just comment and explanation.

To love God does not mean to give him some of our time in the day through the celebration of the Holy Mass and prayer or to offer him our offerings; there is more than it. To love God means to give us entirely to him so that there is no parcel of ourselves that is out of his control. It means to rely completely upon him in everything we undertake and plan. It means to live and act in such a way that our heart, our mind and our soul are set in fire by his word and his degrees. This is what it means to love with the all heart, all soul and all mind.

However, in order to make that love of God visible and touchable, we must have concern for our fellowmen. In this context, the love of our fellows becomes the ground on which we practice the love of God. That is why Jesus does not to separate the love of God and the love of the neighbor. God and the neighbor are two sides of a same coin in so far as God is present in every person.

Some Christians argue that the most import for them is to go to Mass. Therefore, they should be spared about the message on the poor and the needy. By doing so, they obey the first commandment and forget the second. Other Christians operate like social workers. They put out for the poor not because it pleases God, but because it makes them feel good. In other words, the teacher is squeezed out of the package. By doing so, they obey the second commandment and disregard the first. Such people are humanitarian but not really Christians.

Loving God and loving neighbor sum up the law and the prophets. This is not something over and above our daily lives. It is the fabric of our lives. It is that which makes us who we are.

Loving God and the neighbor is the heart of our daily lives, the springboard of our actions, the basis of our decisions, the reason for our prayer life, the motivation of our lifestyle.

Which, then, is the greatest commandment? The commandment to be so close to God that we become his presence to others. Let me illustrate it with a story: "A Young girl was in great distress for having lost a sense of things in her life. "Why does not God let me feel his presence?" she cried. "If only I could feel him and know that he has touched me". Her elderly grandmother, to whom she was complaining, said to her: "Pray to God, right now. Close your eyes and pray to him. Ask him to put out his hand and touch you".

The girl closed her eyes and prayed fervently. Then she felt a hand on her hand. "He touched me. He touched me", she cried out. Then she said, "You know, his hand felt just like yours". "Of course it was my hand", her grandmother said. "That is how God works. He takes the hand that is nearest and uses it".

That is what God does. He looks to see what is available. Is it your hand? Is it my hand? He uses that hand to touch people. "Love God with your whole heart and mind and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself". When our lives are focused on loving God, we become channels of his love to others. In order to love God, it is necessary to be always attentive and ready to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

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.

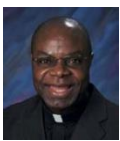
Notice also that loving our neighbor includes sharing with the poor and alien; having compassion, honesty and justice in our relationship with others; never put another life at risk and never taking revenge. Everything we want to be done to us, we should do it to others. Everything we do not want to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

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



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