

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

In the last Sunday's Gospel, our Lord was tested by the Pharisees over the census tax if it was lawful or no to pay it to Caesar. Today they come again with another trap over the greatest of the commandments.

And, when one of them, a scholar of the law questioned our Lord, his intention was not to learn something new than what he already knew, but rather to test him. Any devout Jew (and he was one for he was a scholar of the law) knew, that the commandments were to be kept with equal care. He knew that the basic faith of Israel as formulated in Deuteronomy 6: 5 required to love God with the whole heart, the whole soul and all strength.

Heart, soul and mind point to the totality of the human person so that nothing of him might be left out of the love of God. Here, our Lord and the Scribe were on the same line of thought. The difference, however, comes when our Lord ties together in a same stance the love of God and the love of neighbor as formulated in Leviticus 19: 17-18.

This consideration changes everything. What it means is that the entire law and all the prophecies are designed, ultimately to motivate and enforce love for God and love for our fellow human beings. There is no way of pretending to love God while neglecting the fellow human beings. The love of God can only be made manifest in the love of our fellows. The love of God and the love neighbor go hand in hand to such an extent that one cannot be understood without the other, and vice versa. The Apostle St John (1 John 4: 20) formulates this link between the love of God and the love of neighbor this way: how can you say that you love God you don't see while you hate your brother you see"?

The consequence to draw from such a vision is that our actions toward our neighbor should automatically flow from our love for God. The neighbor or the other becomes a ground on which we practice our love of God. Then, we understand that our love of God has a practical dimension that has to be outwardly seen in our commitment for the welfare of our fellows.

By placing on the same level the love of God and the love of our fellows, our Lord wants to tell us that love is the fulfilment the whole law. The love of God does not mean to give him some of our time in a day through celebration and prayer or to offer him our offerings.

To love God means to give ourselves entirely to him in such a way that there is no cell of our body that is left out of his control. It means to rely completely on him in everything we undertake and do. It is to live and act in such a way that our heart, our mind and our soul are set on fire by his words and his precepts.

However, to make this love of God visible and touchable, one must show it through our concern for our fellows. The love of our brothers and sisters is the ground on which we practice the love of God. God and the neighbor are the two sides of a same coin in so far as in every person God is present. That is why the last just judgement in Matthew 25 is about the works of charity.

Some among us argue that the most important for them is to go to Mass. Therefore, they should be spared about the message on the poor or the needy. What matters the most to

them is God and nothing more. Here they obey the first commandment and forget the second. Others operate on social worker principals. They are preoccupied for the poor not because it pleases God, but because it makes them feel good. They obey the second commandment and disregard the first. Such people are humanitarians but not really Christians.

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

The first reading of today gives us a practical way to live the love of God through the love of neighbor. Unlike many nations of its time, God had given to Israel a legislation that forbade its citizens to do injustice and practice discrimination toward the strangers, the poor and the weak.

The reason for such sensitivity lied in the truth that the people of Israel were strangers in Egypt. Given the suffering they went through and the action of God to set them free, they too should be compassionate, just and sensitive to the cause of the needy and the immigrants. Here, each one of us is invited to do a flash back of his life, to see where he comes from and what the Lord has done for him in his life. Considering all that, each one of us is called to be grateful to God; to be kind and openhearted to the needy, and generous toward the poor, the widows and the orphans.

After having heard things like what I just said, some people ask me, “Why do you always want us to feel guilty as though we were responsible for the situation of the poor”? “We’ve heard enough, too much even of all that”. Well, I would not like to talk about it either. The problem, however, is that it keeps coming up in our scriptures. Unless we want to ignore what God is saying, we have to keep on repeating it. I suppose the only way to guarantee that we won’t talk about it anymore is to eliminate poverty, hunger, and homelessness. But since it’s extremely unlikely that is going to happen in the foreseeable future, then we have to keep insisting on it and just hope that people will be convinced that this is what God is calling us all to do.

The legitimate question still would be: Why is God caring so much for this category of people? The reason is that, given their fragility, they have no protection and can easily fall victims of abuse. To harm them is like harming God himself who is their Father and their protector. That is the reason why God forbids taking interest on loans and recommends avoiding anything that can cause suffering to these people. Because he is merciful, he is sensitive to their cries and tears, and to their requests for help.

Let us ask the Lord to help us keep inseparable the love of God and the love of our fellows. May he give us the courage to work for him by working for our fellows!

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



Homily Date: October 29, 2023
© 2023 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20231029homily.pdf