

Scripture Study

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Exodus 20:20-26

(Ps 18:2-4, 47, 51)

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Matthew 22:34-40

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading finds Jesus again in Jerusalem during the week before his death. Between the time of last Sunday's Gospel and this, he has just finished silencing the members of the religious group, the Sadducees, regarding a question about the Resurrection, a doctrine they did not believe in (Matthew 22:23-33).
- An opposing religious party, the Pharisees, who considered Jesus a breaker of the Jewish Law (see Matthew 12:1-8, 9-14), now pose to him a question that was commonly asked all teachers of the Law: Which commandment—out of the possible 613 recognized precepts of the Law formulated by the rabbis—is the greatest?
- Jesus answers them—not out of the 613 precepts—but out of two of the Mosaic books of the Law (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), the first part of which is found in the *shema*, recited daily by faithful Jews (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
- For Jesus, love (charity) is the greatest theological law (Matthew 19:19; Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8; CCC §§ 1822-1824). The Gospel requires “*faith* (Deuteronomy 6:5) *working through love* (Leviticus 19:18)” (Galatians 5:6).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, we hear from a section of the Book of Exodus where God is giving instruction to his people regarding their conduct among themselves. Specific prescriptions aside, what seems to be the *overall* attitude that God expects us to have toward our neighbor?
- In the 2nd Reading, Saint Paul reminds the Thessalonians how much they have grown in their faith by imitating his example. What are some of the ways their faith has become evident? How much do you strive to imitate Jesus and the Saints?
- In the Gospel Reading, why do you suppose Jesus declares these two commandments the greatest? How would you say the Ten Commandments relate to these two?
- What does Jesus' response to the scribe teach you about Jesus? About the kingdom of God (see 1 John 2:7-11)?
- Why do you think Jesus emphasized loving God with our heart, soul, and mind? How is loving God related to loving people (1 John 4:20-21)?
- What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? How do you love your self? How does that apply to the way you love your neighbor (Matthew 7:12; Ephesians 5:29)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 581, 1822-24, 2055, 2083

Closing prayer

It is easy enough to be drawn to good, healthy people who have pleasant manners, but that is only natural love and not charity. A mother does not love her sick and wasted child because he is lovable, but because she is his mother, and we must pray the Holy Spirit to put into our hearts that selfless devotion which nature has put into hers. –St. Robert Bellarmine

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"You shall love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself"

Scripture: *Matthew 22:34-40*

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

Meditation: What is the purpose of God's law and commandments? The Pharisees prided themselves in the knowledge of the law and the ritual requirements contained in the five Books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). They made it a life-time practice to study the 613 precepts of the Law of Moses along with the numerous commentaries written by various rabbis. They tested Jesus to see if he correctly understood the law and its requirements as they did. Jesus startled them with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. What does God require of us? Simply that we



love as he loves! God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. God's love tempers everything he does – including his justice, mercy, kindness, and goodness and the way he treats both friend and enemy. God loved us first and our love for him is a response to his exceeding grace and kindness towards us. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God. The more we know of God's love and truth the more we love what he loves and reject what is hateful and contrary to his will.

Cyril of Alexandria, a 5th century church father, explains how the love of God orders everything we do.

"Therefore the first commandment teaches every kind of godliness. For to love God with the whole heart is the cause of every good. The second commandment includes the righteous acts we do toward other people. The first commandment prepares the way for the second and in turn is established by the second. For the person who is grounded in

the love of God clearly also loves his neighbor in all things himself. The kind of person who fulfills these two commandments experiences all the commandments."

What makes our love for God and his commands grow in us? Faith in God and hope in his promises strengthens us in the love of God. They are essential for a good relationship with God, for being united with him. The more we know of God the more we love him and the more we love him the greater we believe and hope in his promises. The Lord, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new freedom to love as he loves. Do you allow anything to keep you from the love of God and the joy of serving others with a generous heart? Paul the Apostle says: *hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Romans 5:5)*. Do you know the love which conquers all?

"Lord Jesus, your love surpasses all. Flood my heart with your love and increase my faith and hope in your promises. Help me to give myself in generous service to others as you have so generously given yourself to me."

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