

## Homily of 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus. The Israelites had left Egypt, and no longer under Pharaoh and laws of Egypt. The reading is a section of the guiding principles given to the Israelites by God on how to take care of the weak and the needy among them. The reading made specific mention of aliens, widows, orphans, and the poor. These guiding principles are as important to us today as they were in the time of Exodus. The Lord says, “You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.” This statement needs to be taken seriously in conversations and policies concerning immigration. Is government compassionate when dealing with the poor, the weak and the underprivileged? Why should there be marginalized Americans after over two hundred years of American independence? On our part, in our neighborhood and in the church, do we treat strangers with respect and acceptance? Do we participate in programs directed to helping and supporting the weak, the elderly, the homebound and the poor?

The first reading ends with God saying, “I am compassionate.” Jesus refers us to this statement where he says, “Be compassionate just as your father is compassionate” (Luke 6:36). Are institutions compassionate as they deal with those affected by natural disaster? Do institutions capitalize on “what the law says” and on the ignorance of the victims to the disadvantage of the victims? For example, when FEMA rejects someone’s application, and the insurance company, for some reason, refuses to help the individual, what is such a person going to do? The Lord says that we must not act as extortioners towards people. Are our financial institutions and some other establishments not guilty of extortion? On our part, have we reached out to those in need? Those whose vehicles and houses were damaged by the hurricane and flood, what have we done to show compassion? Such people are the orphans and the widows and the aliens right now in our midst. How far are we compassionate to one another?

Answering the question, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” Yes, God is first in our life. He is our maker. We must love him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind.

But St. John's letter explains Jesus' answer in these words, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother is a liar; for whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:20-21). This means that the first law, love of God, is determined by the second law, love of neighbor. Love of neighbor is the only channel through which we can love God. Love of neighbor is the step on the ladder through which we climb to God. Where there is no love of neighbor there is no love of God, no matter how reverent the worship and how religious the appearance. Jesus makes it clearer when he says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Our reflection today invites us to compassion and love. Today is Priesthood Sunday. I pray for the graces of compassion and love to increase in me in my priestly journey. May I request that you pray for me and with me:

O Jesus, eternal Priest,  
keep your priests within the shelter of Your Sacred Heart,  
where none may touch them.  
Keep unstained their anointed hands,  
which daily touch Your Sacred Body.  
Keep unsullied their lips,  
daily purpled with your Precious Blood.  
Keep pure and unearthly their hearts,  
sealed with the sublime mark of the priesthood.  
Let Your holy love surround them and  
shield them from the world's contagion.  
Bless their labors with abundant fruit and  
may the souls to whom they minister be their joy  
and consolation here and in heaven their beautiful  
and everlasting crown. Amen.

- *St. Therese of Lisieux*

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