

Homily of Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020

Exodus 22:20-26; Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Matthew 22:34-40

In the first reading, the Israelites had left Egypt, and were no longer under Pharaoh and the laws of Egypt. The reading is a section of the guiding rules God gave to the Israelites on how to take care of the weak and the needy among them. The reading mentions aliens, widows, orphans, and the poor. These guiding rules are as important to us today as they were in the time of Exodus considering how badly aliens, immigrants and refugees are currently treated in many parts of the world. Also, xenophobia has become a worrisome problem in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, too, in many countries, governments' and institutions' policies favor the rich and the powerful, leaving the poor and the underprivileged to their fate. In some countries, the plight of the poor and the underprivileged is very ugly because of bad government, corruption, and injustice.

The sin of heartless coveting and forceful possession of what should be the inheritance of orphans and widows was rampant among the Israelites at that time. That was why God gave them the rule, "You shall not wrong any widow or orphan." While injustice against widows and orphans is still huge among some cultures in our world today, by extension, 'widows' and 'orphans' represent the suffering poor, the underprivileged, the unemployed, the marginalized, the powerless, the voiceless, helpless, and so on. In our society, their conditions are made worse by the heartless coveting and forceful possession of what should belong to them by corrupt and mischievous people. We continue to pray for the repentance of those who oppress the poor; those who steal, kill, and plunder; and the corrupt and mischievous people.

We may not be xenophobic, or be among the oppressors of the poor. But on our part, in our homes, in our neighborhood, in our organizations, and in our church community, in our environment; what efforts do we make to help those in need? Do we participate in programs directed at helping and supporting the hungry, the weak, the sick, the elderly, the homebound and the poor? What is our effort to see that there is justice and fairness, that no one is cheated, or dispossessed of his or her rights and privileges, or marginalized?

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." Love of God is not possible without love of neighbor. Human beings are images of God. St. John's letter explains, "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. Jesus makes it clearer when he says, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

How do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Is it possible? We know stories of heroes, heroines, and saints who showed greater love to their neighbor than to themselves. Some of these men and women of goodwill sacrificed their lives to save their neighbor. Such people challenge us.

The Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12 helps us to understand how to love our neighbor as ourselves: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." According to Jewish Rabbi, Hillel, (who was said to have lived around the time of Jesus), "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary on it."

St. Paul's 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 enlightens us with the kind of love through which we can love our neighbor as ourselves: the love that is patient, kind, not jealous, not pompous, not inflated, not rude, not seeking its own interests, not quick-tempered, not brooding over injury, not rejoicing over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

Let genuine love rule our hearts and our actions; everything else will fall in place.

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