

Homily of Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

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.

One would have expected the Israelites who were enslaved in Egypt and who were on their way to the Promised Land to care and love one another. No! It was not long they had left Egypt, those among them who were more privileged turned on the aliens, the widows, the orphans, and the poor, molested them, oppressed them, and forcefully took what belonged to them; committing among themselves the same sins which they were delivered from in Egypt!

This is many countries' experience. For example, Nigeria was colonized by Britain for over 60 years. Nigeria got independence in 1960. Seven years after the independence, Nigerians turned on themselves and plunged into a civil war that claimed more than three million lives within the three years the war lasted. Across the world, people are fleeing from their own countries, dying across deserts, drowning in seas, treated inhumanly by human smugglers and traffickers, and some places the escapees are seeking refuge because of oppression and cruelty by their own people. Here in the United States, we see the menace of gun violence against one another. Senseless and mindless in-fighting exists in families, communities, parishes, and so on.

Therefore, the guiding rules God gave to the Israelites are as important to us today as they were for the Israelites. The plight of the poor and the underprivileged in our communities and society cannot be over emphasized. The heartless coveting and forceful possession of what belongs to the people and what should benefit the people, by corrupt and mischievous people, is well known. We continue to pray for the repentance of those who steal, kill, and plunder, and the corrupt and mischievous people who oppress the poor, the powerless, and the voiceless.

On our part, let us avoid greed and injustice and stand against those vices wherever we find ourselves. Let us always stand for fairness, justice, and compassion.

"You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan" (Exodus 20:20-21). This is justice and compassion. In the same vein, aliens, widows, and orphans are not to become thorns in the flesh of relatives and communities.

"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors ..., you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in?" (Exodus 20:24-26). This is fairness

and compassion. In the same vein, the poor person is to be humble instead of arrogant. A combination of poverty and arrogance is bad news.

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" (Matthew 22:36-40). 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. 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).

For all of us, our love for one another will go far with humility, fairness, compassion, and justice. May God bless us with these virtues. Amen.

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