

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 29th October 2017

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Matt 22:34-40)

You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: you must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

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Here is the continuing confrontation by the Jewish legal experts, the Pharisees in their so-called clever adversarial question. The answer of Jesus is classic! His response comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and Leviticus 19:18. It is salutary for us to remember that Jesus was a Jew raised in the tradition and culture of the Hebrew scriptures. He is not only familiar with the Torah, but also in living and preaching the practise of its commandments. Jesus dresses like a Jew, he wears the "fringes" (Matt 12:20) his parable stories are Jewish, and he reads the Hebrew scripture in the synagogue, (Luke 4:16-22)

When Jesus is asked "which commandment in the law is greatest?" He and his interlocutors knew that the traditional number of commandments in rabbinic literature is 613. Jesus will have none of this casuistry. Simply put, Jesus speaks of the double commandment- love of God and love of your neighbour. In this we can lose sight of the biblical meaning of love. In our culture we have equated love with intense emotion, to love is a stronger emotion than to like. And both are measures of a passive response to something outside us- we like chocolate, we love a movie, we love our boyfriend or girlfriend. Biblical love is not passive, and it is not strictly emotional. The love referred here by Jesus is the love of Deuteronomy 6:5- the love of God. This love is far from passive, it is an active response of the faithful person to the love of God. In the Greek Testament the principle word used for love is "agape"- It is about what we might call loving-kindness. Not a passive emotion, but active mercy. It is marked by patience, generosity, self-sacrifice, care, kindness and mercy, reaching out especially to the "anawim" in Hebrew meaning "those who are bowed down"- the poor, the outcast, widow and orphan. In short, loving is a self-sacrificing choice, not a do-good feeling. It is not a question of just loving those we like. Our love is to be universal- reaching out to the dirty, the poor, the repugnant, and even to those who harm us- we are to act according to the law of love.

Jesus equates the love of God with our love for others. In reaching out and serving all, this is how we show our love for God. These two loves are inseparable!

1. We can avoid the dilemma of "faith" versus "works" if we remember simply that our faith to be truly lived out is done in loving sacrifice to others.
2. We are called to a love that is universal and unconditionally without limits.
3. We are called to see others as Jesus would see them, knowing too that God "agape's" us even when we cannot "agape" one another.

Take home Message