

October 29, 2023
Cycle A – 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 22:20-26

Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Matthew 22:34-40

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

1. In today's Gospel, Jesus answers the lawyer's question about which is the greatest Commandment. He cites first, Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind." He then adds Leviticus 19, "Love your neighbor as yourself."
 - a. Jesus is the first to put these together and it is important to note that they come from his own Jewish tradition.

2. More recently, a rabbi asked, "When the people of Israel made a golden calf while Moses was on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments inscribed on two tablets, why didn't he break just the one referring to God? Why did he break both?" The first three reveal how we must live our relationship to God, the other 7, to our neighbor.
 - a. Because our love of neighbor draws its strength and insight from our relationship with God.
 - b. If we love God with all our mind, heart and soul, we can love our neighbor as ourselves. Why? Because God endowed us with great dignity, creating us in God's own image and likeness according to the Book of Genesis.
 - c. Also, the God of the Old Testament stands with the most vulnerable, the widow, the orphan and the immigrant as is evident in the first reading from Exodus: "If you don't take care of the widow and the orphan, I will send the sword and your wives will be widows and your children will be orphans!" So must we.
 - d. Furthermore, as Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, identifies with each and every human being and stands in solidarity with the most vulnerable among us – the widow, the orphan and the foreigner.

3. Example of Jesus: He always, always puts His Father and His Father's will at the center of His prayer and life. For instance, during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemani, when He asks to be relieved of his impending suffering and adds, "Not my will but yours be done."
 - a. He shows his love for neighbor by his many acts of kindness such as...curing the sick and even lepers, feeding hungry people.
4. Love of God – Like Jesus, we must spend time with God. Can you love someone without spending time with him or her?
5. Love of Neighbor: "But who is my neighbor?" Being neighbor (1) has no geographical, racial or cultural limits. (2) Being neighbor is active – it is up to us to reach out to those in need as did the GOOD SAMARITAN.
6. The opposite of love is hate. It is so subtle and poisonous to those who hate and to those impacted by their hateful actions.
 - a. We see hate directed toward Muslims in our country and also against Jews.
 - b. There are politicians who stir up fear and hate, for instance of immigrants and Muslims and of those who don't think like them.
 - c. One sees hate driving some of the demonstrations on college campuses.
 - d. As Catholic Christians, we must pray for the grace to reject the strong temptation to hate and replace it with a love that alone can move us and others toward peace in our hearts and in our society.
 - e. But can't we disagree with others? Of course, but disagreement must never lead to hate and even worse, the temptation to do harm.
 - f. What does Jesus say? "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you and pray for those who persecute you."

g. * This is how Jesus himself lived. He didn't hate those who were responsible for his being crucified. Rather he prayed, "Father forgive them because they don't know what they are doing."

* And the words of Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address should be a guide for us during these times of division and rancor: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ~ to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

7. EUCHARIST: It is Jesus who shows His love for His Father by becoming obedient even to a horrible death on a cross AND for us as He gives himself to us as our food. Thus, He enables us to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves, no matter who he or she is.

Amen.