

July 10, 2022
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Practice What You Preach

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Psalms 69: 14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

Last week we mentioned that, “Whenever in the Bible we read the words, ‘Thus says the Lord,’ we need to stop, listen, and pay attention because often times the message is exactly what we need to hear.”

In today’s first reading Moses made a very similar statement, “If only you would heed the voice of the Lord, your God, and keep His commandments.” When we couple these two very important exhortations, it would be reasonable to assume that God seems to be telling us to slow down, stop, listen, and then obey.

Here we might ask; why did Moses put such an emphasis on keeping God’s commandments? In a nut shell the answer is because our heavenly Father knows what is best for His children. Likewise, I think most parents would agree that it is not always easy for children to accept the fact that for the most part parents know what is best for them.

Therefore, as we meditate on the Scripture texts this morning, we will discover that God desires for us is to experience His mercy and grace in a very personal way. Subsequently He wants us to stop being so busy and spend a little more time with Him by reading His Word, taking time to meditate, and listening for His still small voice.

Therefore, the 30th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy sets the stage for the gospel reading and St Luke's well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. Here the Bible describes Moses who was now nearing the end of his life, instructing the children of Israel to observe all the commands and statutes the Lord God had given them to keep. If they chose to obey God they would have an abundant life, and if they chose to disobey God they would surely die without peace.

Having led the children of God for nearly forty years through the wilderness Moses was now preparing to pass the responsibility of leadership onto his long time protégé Joshua. But before he left this world Moses wanted to remind the people one last time of what the Lord God required of them in order to remain safely under His protection.

You see, the Israelites were no strangers to witnessing God's Presence, they had heard the thunder, they had witnessed the lightning, and they had felt the ground shake when God talked to Moses. In addition, they had also witnessed the tablets of stone, they heard the reading of the Law, and they understood the rules and the requirements. Certainly, Moses had given them clear instructions, and they all agreed and pledged their allegiance to obey.

However, for some people, hearing about God and even witnessing the saving acts of God is not enough. A Holy God requires changed behavior subsequently Moses told the people; "[*If only*] if only you would heed the voice of the Lord, your God, and keep His commandments and statutes written in this book of law. . . . For this command that I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and

remote for you. . . . No, it is something very near you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.”

Indeed, they had the message and it was deeply implanted in their hearts. Yet, like many today, they would all too soon forget to *do* what was expected.

So then, why was Moses so adamant about reiterating all of God’s commandments to the Israelites? Most likely the same reason why today preachers, and teachers and homilists keep reminding us of what we may have already heard many times before? The reason is simple; we humans have an uncanny ability to incorporate a phenomenon called selective minamalization into our thinking processes.

Here we pick and choose based on the minimum expectations. In other words we do just enough to pass the test, or we do/or not do just enough so as to not break the law or get into trouble.

I think you know what I mean here; how many times have we gone just 5 miles an hour over the speed limit so as not to get caught; or on the other hand choose to do just enough so as to meet the minimum requirements or standards? Think about it, most codes and rules define the minimum standards - not the upper limits of excellence.

However as we shall soon discover, our relationship with God is intended to be more than just sliding by with minimum effort. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus encountered a fellow who had heard the Law, and furthermore it was well planted within his mind; as a matter of fact he was an expert in this matter. The man

was a scholar and teacher of the Law, and yet he had a very serious question for the Lord; indeed, a question each of us ought to consider and be well versed.

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Subsequently, Jesus answered the-would-be legal expert with another question. In other words, sir, look a little deeper into your motives, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” No surprise here, the scholar repeated the exact same message Moses had told the people approximately 1,272 years earlier.

Jesus replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” “Do this and you will live.” How much clearer could Jesus have been? The scholar was correct in his answer; being a legal expert he had quoted the right answer directly from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and for the most part - for Jesus that answer seemed to meet the minimum requirements for him to inherit eternal life.

However, there is more to this story; because, and here is a little background information in that the afore mentioned passages Jesus cited from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 pertained only to Israelites as constituting being a neighbor. According to the minimum standards of the Law people like Samaritans and/or Gentiles were not considered to be neighbors. In other words, an Israelite did not have to treat them in the same manner, as they would have to treat a fellow son or daughter of Abraham.

“Well then Jesus, said the scholar, who is my neighbor?” I can only imagine Jesus musing, I thought you would never ask, let Me explain something about knowing the right answer and the reality of actually doing what is right. So He offered him a parable to consider.

- A certain man fell victim to a robbery and he was left for dead
- A priest came along saw his plight and moved to the other side of the road. He would not stop to help him
- Likewise a Levite and he passed by on the opposite side of the road too
- Finally, a Samaritan traveler, one who was considered by many self-righteous Jews as being unclean stopped, [looked, and listened], and then cared for the man even paying for his aftercare.

Jesus finished the story and then asked the legal scholar, which of the three was the neighbor to the victim left for dead?

The scholar answered correctly again, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus then challenged him in a manner similar to how Moses had instructed the children of Israel, “Go and do likewise, or “You have only to carry it out.”

Now there is one more thing that we do not want to miss here before we close. If we reread the story, and I hope you will, we notice that the legal scholar asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus never directly answered that question.

Instead, Jesus told a story and then asked him a question, “Who was the victim’s neighbor?” Have you noticed that God likes to ask you and me questions that are intended to scour the soul? Thinking about God’s holiness is good for us.

The nuance of Jesus’ methodology is noteworthy because the scholar asked a question, and Jesus answered him with a parable that addressed a slightly different question, maybe the question the scholar should have asked in the first place

The legal scholar asked, “Who is my neighbor? In other words, “Whom am I supposed to love?” The focus here is on the other – who is it that is my neighbor? Is it the one to whom I am supposed to act kindly? In other words, do I have to be nice to everyone?

What if I don’t like them, or like what they are doing? Being a scholar, he was probably referring more to Leviticus 19:18, “Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [Says] the LORD.”

Again, the legal scholar asked, “Who is my neighbor? Jesus’ answer spoke to the heart of the real question, which is, “*Are you a neighbor who loves much? Do you go beyond what is minimally expected and offer mercy even when and where it is not deserved?*”

Do you go beyond what is expected in your giving, time, money, resources? God asks for a tenth of your first fruits, but do you go beyond just giving a tithe to give special alms and offerings so that those who genuinely have less could receive a little more?

The focus here is not on *whom* to love, but rather on *how* to love. In other words am I a person who truly loves others and extends mercy and resources? In the context and words of the past few Sunday readings, do I deny myself, pick up my cross, forsake all, set my hand to the plow and not look back, pass the peace of Christ, expand the kingdom of God and truly regard the well being of others above my myself?

Speaking from personal experience, I wish it were the case 100% of the time. Yet I know my own shortcomings all too well, and more than likely we all have room to grow in this department.

You see, a neighbor is not only the person who lives next door or down the street. Instead, a neighbor is one who passes the peace of Christ to whomever he/she meets or greets. A neighbor is one who lends a helping hand when there is a need, and sometimes even when there isn't a need. A neighbor is one who reaches out to a person who may live a lifestyle completely different from theirs. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt 25:40).

Lets face it, being a neighbor is not always easy. Indeed, love is a sacrifice that often demands that we lay it all down to follow Jesus. Hence the reason Moses reminded the people, "When you return to the Lord *with all your heart and all your soul*, - then heed the commandments and the statutes written in the Book of the Law."

In closing, Jesus in very simple and practical terms summed up the whole law in loving God and loving neighbor.

Some 450 years after Jesus ascended back into heaven St. Augustine would write, "Without God we cannot; without us God will not."

Here we might propose a practical application of Augustine's thesis as, "when people need help, help them, when they need a friend, be a friend. When they need someone to listen, listen. When they need to hear that God loves them, tell them. When they need the sacraments and the support of others, invite them to Mass. When they need a little financial assistance, make sure the money is available to help them.

In the final analysis loving God and loving neighbor is not complicated, and/or more than we can comprehend. We already know what we are supposed to do. We hear the charge every week as we conclude the Sacred Liturgy; "the Mass is ended - go forth to love and serve the Lord."

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.