

# Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 10, 2022

## Reading 1

Dt 30:10-14

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11

R.(9a) Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

## Reading 2

Col1:15-20

## Gospel

Lk 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "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 with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*" He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

## HOMILY:

A buddy of mine and I made a pilgrimage to the modern nation of Turkey, which contains some of the most ancient and venerated Christian historical sites: the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, the Cappadocian region, Constantinople, and the cities of the Apocalypse, featured in the last book of the Bible. For a follower of Jesus, these are sacred spots, where our faith took root, flourished, and matured into the faith that we profess today. But, perhaps the best preserved of all these Christian sites is that of Ephesus (as in the "The Letter to the Ephesians"), the legendary home of St. John the Beloved disciple of the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel and the final home of Mary, the Mother of God. As a student of theology, we had been taught of the strong connection between Ephesus and Mary, the Mother of God. Even beyond the fact that this is where she ended her earthly life before being assumed, body and soul, into heaven, it was the place that, in the year 431, bishops from around the Christian Mediterranean world, gathered to discuss and then proclaim the truth that Mary was the *theotokos*, "the Mother of God" or "God Bearer." While the term is familiar to us now, it was a title discussed for nearly 4 centuries, where followers of Jesus tried to wrap their minds around how a simple human person could bear the Almighty God in her womb. Finally, they said, "yes, she did give birth to God, because Jesus was fully God and fully human, and she did indeed bear him to the world. She was *theotokos*, the Mother of God. And, in doing so, the

Council Fathers of the Council of Ephesus, 431, held firm to the true yet confounding reality that Jesus was fully God and fully human, the Son of Mary, the Son of God.

So solemn was this declaration of the *theotokos* that the bishops had a new, splendid church built for the occasion. Over the next 100 years, it was built into an even larger and more splendid Cathedral, the seat of the Bishop of Ephesus, a fitting monument to the monumental declaration that happened there. It is for this reason that we continue to pray, “holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death” and why we have images and statues of the mother of God in our churches. Yet now, one has to really want to find the church to discover it. For, amid all the ruins of Ephesus, very much off the beaten path from the center of the historic city, one can find a small, unobtrusive sign that says in Turkish, “Meryem Kilisesi,” and then, in a very small subscript, “the Church of Mary.” With the thousands of churches dedicated to Mary, one can miss this small sign, for it points to THE Church of Mary, where she was proclaimed “the Mother of God.”

Now...this splendid, historic church, the very center of the life of the universal church and its devotion to the Mother of God, is nothing more than a pile of ruins! Once one of the glories of Christendom, it is now only with careful consideration that one can see the outlines of a classic basilical design, the pillars of along the nave and the rounded apse, just like the one we have here at St. Edward. From its original splendor, it has fallen a long way into near obscurity and unrecognizability. For me, it is one of the many lessons of the sites of antiquity—once so grand, now barely existing.

This haunting site speaks to a truth that we all know—even the most splendid creations of humanity, even those that speak to eternal truths, will certainly and finally succumb to the ravages of time and reveal that they are not eternal. In a less sublime example, just a couple block from here, Shoitz Memorial Hospital, where so much living, healing, and dying had happened, now is ...gone. And...though we have spent quite a bit of effort and resources making accessibility improvements to the church in which we now pray, we can presume that someday it too will be ...gone, no more.

But...in the temporary, passing spaces in which we live, eternal things are indeed happening. This is the truth behind the gospel we hear today, the meeting between Jesus and the scholar of the law, who asks Jesus, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” In other words, which actions, seemingly temporary and passing, lead to that which does not last? And...to this insightful question, Jesus speaks of the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. And, in case we’re wondering if he’s speaking of eternal things, the biblical word for a “commandment,” *entolé* (ἐντολή), literally means “the end,” that is, the final, enduring purpose of living. When all else passes, Jesus says, live for that which lasts, for the end that is eternal—the love of God and the love of neighbor. And because the Lord wants us to live into everlasting life, he teaches us that the way to this end, these “entoles,” are the great two commandments, love of God and love of neighbor. These are the ways to live fully, eternally, beginning now!

In the parable that Jesus uses to illustrate the end of our lives, he gives us the Good Samaritan, who willing spends passing wealth, to provide for that which does not pass, the eternal soul, lying by the side of the road, whom he restores to life. As we live the two great and inseparable commands, loving God by loving our neighbor, we fulfill our end, that for which we were created, the commandments of God that do not pass.

In the end, Jesus says, in essence, *why live simply for things that pass, unless you put them at the service of that which does not pass—the eternal life of others and the Eternal that is God.*

Our communal construction project, to “Open Wide the Doors to Christ,” only has value when we improve the accessibility of the Church, where we find our end, that which is eternal and lasts herein—the praise of the Eternal God and a strengthening at this altar by the very life of the eternal God, that fills us and equips us for our “end,” that eternal end for which we have been created: love of God and love of neighbor. When these stones lay in ruins, and when many of our efforts pass away, those monuments to the love of God, our lives, here experienced and nourished, will remain. Hadn’t we better live for God and neighbor? For they alone last.