

## **The 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 9-10, 2022**

In the reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses instructs the people about the Law. However, it is important for us to know that the law that he is referring to is far from what most people think of when they hear the word ‘law’. The law in the Scriptures is understood as instructions or teachings and was intended by God to be a guide for living well.

Today in the first reading Moses reminds the people that God’s laws for the people were written not just in the Scriptures which they have, but also in their hearts. For example, one Scripture scholar said that the 10 commandments were simply the natural law that is in very heart written out in words. It is not spoken of much, but in every person’s heart there are also natural laws that tell us that it is wrong to kill, take what belongs to another and that it is good to help others, give honor to God and respect life, etc. And almost all religions have some version of the Golden Rule – “Do unto others what you have them do unto you.”

So Moses is absolutely right in trying to impress upon the Israelites that God’s commandments are not mysterious or remote, up in the sky or across the sea. God’s law is within them, and they only need to recognize it and live it out. If properly formed, our consciences are a good guide.

So God has given wise and wonderful laws to us and all humanity, however, God didn’t just create us and give us directions for life and then go off somewhere else in the universe. In today’s readings we are also reminded that God himself is near to us, and in fact has joined himself fully and forever to our humanity in the person and incarnation of Jesus.

So God doesn’t just make his will known to us – he revealed himself and his divine nature to us in the humanity of Jesus. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Galatians: “Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God – the firstborn of all creation --- in him were created all things in heaven and on earth.” And even more than that, St. Paul reminds us that our existence is completely dependent on Him. We have no existence on our own – only God exists

in himself. As God said to Moses when revealing his name to him in the burning bush experience: "I am Who Am." St. Paul says, "All were created through Christ and for him, and in him all things hold together. That's the theological way of saying we are very close to God and that in essence we live in God. From this we can even say that heaven is not just some time in the future but began already in our baptism in which God shares his life with us and comes to dwell within us. This is a wonderful theological reflection to ponder, but believe it or not, today's Gospel proclaims the nearness of God to us in even more everyday practical terms.

As much as God wants to be near us and give himself completely to us and we want him to be with us and near us --- there is also a side to us that wants to control how close God is to us and tends to find excuses to hold ourselves back from giving our whole self in response to God and to others. That is what we run into in today's Gospel.

A legal scholar stands up to test Jesus and asks him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the law says. The legal scholar quotes the law that we should love God above all and our neighbor as ourself. Then, the scholar – to justify himself and to really qualify how much he should love and give of himself to others, he asks Jesus – "Who is my neighbor?" For this scholar, "neighbor" meant another scribe or Pharisee but never a Gentile or a Samaritan who were considered enemies of the Jews..

This question raises up the competition we often run into in our own life between love and legalism. How often when we see something not being done or done right do we not ask whose job or responsibility it is to take care of that need or that person in need other than ourselves. --- In response to the scholar and to his question Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus shows that love must take precedence over legalism. Mercy must triumph over strict adherence to the law. Authentic love is not legalistic.

The Good Samaritan in today's parable offers the gift of unexpected compassion. But it isn't any old random act of kindness. This is a Samaritan tending to a suffering Jew who has fallen victim to robbers. His compassion is unexpected because he is unwelcome, a foreigner in a

country determined to keep Samaritans out. We have an example of the same in our country today. Many migrants have crossed the border illegally for the betterment of life for themselves and their families but we often find them unexpectedly helping us out by doing the work that nobody else want to do in our farms, factories and nursing homes.

However, getting back to the parable, when we look at how caring the Samaritan was to victim in need – taking time to stop and care for the man and bring to a place where he could stay and then ready to pay whatever bill there would be until he returned. When we look more deeply at his actions we see not only a “good” Samaritan person but how God has acted toward us. St. Bernard of Clairveaux sees in this parable not only how Christ became the victim in need of mercy as he suffered for our salvation, but at the same time how God in Christ is our Good Samaritan – our good neighbor.

We in response are called by this parable to enter ourselves into this way of God – to give our entire selves to our neighbors by entering into their suffering. Jesus instructs the scholar of the law to act mercifully, just as did the Samaritan traveler. Pope Benedict in one of his encyclicals explained that our union with Christ cannot be with Christ alone. “Our union with Christ, he said, is also union to all those to whom Christ give himself.” Just as Christ is a visible image of God, so our neighbor is the visible image of Christ in our midst.

The Latin American bishops wrote in one of their documents the “poor deserve preferential treatment because they have been made in the image and likeness of God and this image has been obscured and even violated. For this reason, God has become their defender, and the Church, following the spirit of the Beatitudes, is called to be on their side.” People are criticized for crossing barriers to help others, but this is the compassion that will break down the barriers to full realization of the kingdom of God. At the Last Supper, Jesus, the heavenly Good Samaritan gave us a new commandment – “Love one another as I have love you,” because the invisible God dwells in every human being. In today’s parable Jesus clearly raises the standard on what it means to be “good and we are called to go and do the same..