



October 29, 2023
30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

"For I am compassionate." Exodus 22:26



Dear Friends;

Jesus gives a deceptively simple answer to the question posed by Pharisees and legal experts. Which is the most important commandment of the law? Jesus joins two Biblical quotations about the love of God (from Deuteronomy) and the love of neighbor as oneself (from Leviticus). It is the joining of the two as one commandment that is controversial.

Dominican Friar Fr. Timothy Radcliff compares these two commandments to the two hemispheres of the brain both have their own specific focus. But they are joined together by a small cord containing millions of nerve fibers which allows the brain to function harmoniously. Without that connection the brain cannot act in unison.

On one side, we must love God with all the faculties of our mind and heart. We were fashioned by transcendent and unimaginable, faithful love. In seeking this love, we flourish. Without this transcendent love, love is reduced to sentimentality, or passing emotions. However, seeking divine love without bringing it down to earth can lead us to religious and ideological fanaticism.

This is the problem with the Pharisees in our passage from Matthew today. They are so convinced by their ideology that they use their intelligence to try and destroy Jesus rather than to love him. Their hatred prevents them from seeing Jesus through the eyes of love. He becomes not a neighbor but an object to be destroyed.

Today, religious fanaticism is driving all kinds of extreme behavior. Fanaticism is a response to fear. The world to the fanatic appears frightening, threatening, and out of control. Fanatics want to cut through all the complexities. They want a simplistic world that they can control. They believe God to be the answer. In this they are partially correct. However, they leave out the other part of the equation. That is the human, and the real. Without being turned in love to their neighbor, their religious love will scorch the earth.

In the Holy Land a war is being fought that is driven by fanatics. Hamas believes that God has given them the blessing to annihilate the country of Israel and to drive the Jews to extinction. The Jewish extremists believe that God wants them to restore the boundaries of Israel to what they were at their zenith in biblical times.

Many Israelis are building settlements on land that belongs to the Palestinian people who have occupied that land for centuries. The Israeli government is doing nothing to stop these illegal settlements. In one interview a woman says God has given this land to the Jews and so they are taking it, without regard to the people to whom it belongs. Hamas and Jewish extremists are religious zealots whose religious piety is an invincible wall against reason and charity. Religious zealotry makes it impossible to negotiate a just peace.

St Thomas tells us that grace builds on nature. What he means is we cannot speak of God without also speaking about our relationships to other people and creation. Otherwise, we are deluding ourselves. Christians proclaim that we need God AND each other. The tiny cord that joins the two hemispheres (God and human) is the Incarnation of the one who is both human and divine.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church