

Homily For the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year A

St. Peter's Sunday 10:00/12:00/5:00 Masses October 25, 2020

Exodus 22:21-27 "If those you abuse or wrong cry out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate."

Psalms 18:1-3++ "I love you, O Lord, my strength ... my rock, my fortress, my deliverer ... my salvation."

1 Thess 1:5-7 "You turned to God from idols ... to Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming."

Matt 22:34-40 "Love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. On these hang the Law & Prophets."

One God - Two Laws - One Meaning: Love

Introduction

Winter already means a lot of snow this year. I remember being in elementary school in Ontario when there was a lot of snow. The plows would come in to move the snow from the paved part of the schoolyard. They would pile it up so that it made what seemed to us like mountains. Guess what we kids did with those mountains of snow? Let as many kids as possible run up and down them? No way! We played 'king of the mountain' for the entire recess. Anyone who wanted to be the king had to push everyone else off, especially any challengers. I don't remember if anyone ever got hurt but that was some serious game.

Being king and taking on challengers almost always is violent. We call Jesus the king of kings because he holds all authority in heaven and on earth in himself. And here today in the Gospel, Matthew tells us of the kind of violent hatred they brought against him. Those who made themselves his enemy challenged his authority one after another after another.

But Jesus was not trying to capture some meaningless symbol of superiority. He wasn't trying to show them how great he was. He was looking to bring the infinite and merciful love of God into the middle of the lives of all people. He was lifting up that love so all could see it. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

Their question was a challenge to the king. His answer was 'love'.

Challengers

Kings and challengers. That's my sense of how Matthew presents his Gospel. Jesus on his way to Jerusalem for the ultimate confrontation. Along the way, Jesus is willing to play their game, but not so he can become 'king of the castle' but so he can declare the truth about God, about people and about how to live and why. Last week, the Pharisees thought they would beat by ganging up on him with the Herodians. Those two groups hated each other but joined forces to try to defeat Jesus with the question about paying taxes. Jesus took the coin they produced and said: Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. They were amazed at his answer and had nothing more to say. Jesus was still the king.

Right after that, in Matthew's Gospel, the Sadducees, another group, went after Jesus with a clever story to challenge the idea that there is a resurrection. But Jesus did not back down. Now they didn't believe in the resurrection so they challenged Jesus about whether there is such a thing. How did Jesus defeat them? He said "you are wrong because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God. God is the God of the living, not the dead." They were astounded and had nothing to say because they had never heard it expressed like that before. They were silenced. In an instant, Jesus opened up the scriptures to the fullness of the truth that is contained in them. God wants to raise us to a new life that we cannot imagine. Jesus and his message of life with God were still king.

It says that the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. Now the Pharisees get together to discuss whether they can attack him in a different way that might defeat Jesus and his influence with the people.

Now just before continuing with this event, I want to take a very short side trip to the Psalm today. This psalm, number 18, is a very special psalm because King David, the greatest Old Testament king, tells us that he is the one who wrote this psalm. It's so important that it is also included in the 2 Samuel, near the end of David's life. In it, he tells of his dependence on God who protected him. Do you remember the very first time God defended him in battle? Yes, it was against the huge warrior, Goliath. The Philistine army chose him as their champion, to go

against whoever the Israelites would choose. That turned out to be the barely teenaged shepherd boy, David, God's anointed one, God's choice of king.

Now, let's turn back to the Pharisees. So, as with the Philistines choosing Goliath, the Pharisees get together to choose someone to go after Jesus in a battle of words about the law. It says they chose a lawyer. What they have done is choose their smartest scholar of the law. He knows the Torah inside out, and all 613 laws that govern the Jewish people. He is the new Goliath they choose to go after Jesus, the new David.

Question and Answer

This Goliath confronts Jesus with a question they think will stump him: Which is the greatest of the 613 laws. Sometimes they ask Jesus a question to trick him. This is not a trick question but is designed to see if this upstart preacher from Galilee has enough knowledge to be teaching others about God and his will for their lives. It's like a one question pass or fail final exam.

The First Great Commandment

Jesus the king answers with the two love commandments. The first is the Shema prayer. Everyone knew it. They were to say it every day. Love God with all your heart, soul and strength. But Jesus adds something. He says: love God with all your mind as well. Seek the true knowledge of God. If you do, you will love him and your love for him will lead you to want to know him more. We usually say: I love you with all my heart. No one says: I love you with all my mind. But Jesus wants us to include this. Don't just use your mind for knowledge of the world, but seek to learn more about God. Knowledge and love become a cycle, not of violence but of virtue.

Love God: Psalm and 1 Thessalonians

Listen to David, the king, talk about his relationship with God. This David, who had lived as a fugitive because of jealousy, who lost safety, his youth, his family, his career, his rights, his connection with the covenant people of God. Despite all this, he remained steadfast to the Lord. He says: I love you, O Lord, my strength. The

Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer ... the source of my salvation ... Great triumphs he gives to his king and shows steadfast love to his anointed. When he says: I love you, he uses a word used nowhere else in the Hebrew Scripture. It has a special depth and tenderness. I will love you dearly and entirely, from the very depth of my heart.

Listen to what St. Paul says about this love of God. Speaking to the Christians at Thessalonica: You were joyful as you turned from pagan idols. You serve the one living and true God. You wait for God's Son from heaven, the one who delivers those who turn to God. You have faith, love, and hope, despite being persecuted by being ostracised, mob activity, legal proceedings and even killings.

The Second Great Commandment

The second great commandment, Jesus tells the scholar of the law who is trying to knock him off the hill, is to love your neighbour. That's from Leviticus 19:18. It calls people to love our neighbour with the same care we have for our very own needs.

Love Neighbour: Exodus

Listen to what it says in the book of Exodus about loving neighbour and see if it applies to us today as it did in the time of the Exodus, as it did in the time of Jesus on earth, and today:

- You shall not wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.
- You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. I will surely heed their cry and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.
- If you lend money to the poor, you shall not deal with them as a creditor. You shall not exact interest. If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down for their cover. And, if that person cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.

Whether we respond to the appeal to justice, or compassion, or the threat of losing God's protection, we should be able to see how loving our neighbour is

loving what God loves. That's why the two go together. That will be the question for ourselves: Do I love what God loves?

Two Commandments: One Love

Jesus puts those two commandments together from entirely different parts of the law and says they are like each other. They depend on each other. You can't have one without the other. Together the two love commandments sum up the entire law, the Ten great commandments and all 613 of the rest. Literally, they provide a structure that the entire Torah and all the teaching of the Prophets can hang on. That means no other commandment of the Bible is properly observed if either one of these is transgressed or compromised. For the aim of all divine Scripture is to bring us out of ourselves to love and serve God and our fellow human beings.

Jesus Is Still the King

With his answer, Jesus killed and chopped off the head of their Goliath. My friends, Jesus is no pitiful and weak character. He is not meek in the face of the attack of a ferocious beast. Don't make him into a cute and lovable pet who obeys our commands. He is none of those things. He is the king of the castle, the king of kings.

And yet ... and yet, our Lord and king comes to us as a baby, born in poverty, hunted by tyrants, persecuted by those who don't understand their own prophecies and, today, anyone who would not recognize the source of love.

Matthew tell us of the forces gathering and aligning against Jesus. The Pharisees gradually betray their faith in their jealousy and hatred. Eventually, they give up challenging him on law and love. They are amazed, astounded and silenced. And so, they enlist the world's brutal forces, Roman justice, the crucifixion.

Again, they think they have knocked Jesus off the hill. Today, as persecution of Christ, his Church and his people increases, Jesus has already defeated them by conquering death itself. The only question unanswered is for each of us. Jesus himself asks it. Will love God with all of your will and mind. Give yourself to him completely. And will you love those whom he loves, your neighbour

Lord, increase our faith, hope and charity. Make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise.

Key Verses Today

Exodus: *Thus says the Lord: You shall not wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. I will surely heed their cry (and) my wrath will burn. Your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. If you lend money to the poor, you shall not deal with them as a creditor. You shall not exact interest. If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down for their cover. And, if that person cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.*

Psalms: *I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer ... the source of my salvation ... Great triumphs he gives to his king and shows steadfast love to his anointed.*

1 Thessalonians: *Brothers and Sisters, you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. They report what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

Matthew: *When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him: Teacher, which commandment in the Law is the greatest? Jesus said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.*