

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

St. Peter's Sat/Sun 5:00pm Masses, October 29, 2023

(Day of Prayer for Peace)

Exodus 22:21-27 "You shall not wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."

Psalms 18:1-3++ "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my refuge, my salvation."

1 Thess 1:5-10 "Brothers and sisters, you became imitators of us and of the Lord."

Matt 22:34-40 "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

No Mediocre Effort Allowed

Introduction

A track club coach had just watched some of his runners do very poorly in a national championship race. I know this because I was there watching the better runners in my club compete. But the results were disastrous. It seemed like something wasn't quite right with the athletes he had poured his heart and soul into training for this event. But then he saw some of them right after their race playing a game of soccer. They looked very energetic. One even jumped over a fence to get the ball. When he found out that they had not taken their final preparations seriously. Immediately, he called them together and said: "Boys, you did poorly today in your races and now I see you playing as if you had all the energy in the world. I worked hard to prepare you for today. Your parents sacrificed to support you in many ways. But from what I've seen, I don't think you gave it everything you had to give. I want you to think about what it means to be committed and to really do your best."

St. Paul even talks about how following Christ is like a running race. To be at our best is not easy. It takes discipline just as running well in a race does. Following Jesus is not easy. In fact it is hard. Let's admit that. We call ourselves Christian, not because we are baptized, although that is partly true. We call ourselves Christian, not because we think Jesus is nice and makes things easy for us to be on his team.

No doubt, Jesus is sometimes quite likeable, We call ourselves Christians, not simply because we go to mass. That is admirable and the right thing for a Christian to do, but you and I know that we can do this reluctantly, or find excuses not to do it at all. The worst thing about covid was that many of us got used to not going to mass. This is a very dangerous thing for our faith and our salvation. If being a Christian is not just about those things, what is it about?

Matthew

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. Along the way, it seemed like Jesus had to keep playing games with those who were trying to trick him. Last week, the Pharisees thought they would beat him by ganging up on him with a group called the Herodians. Those two groups hated each other but they 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. Jesus ONE. Pharisees and Herodians ZERO.

Right after that, the Sadducees took a shot at Jesus, asking a question about whether there is a resurrection. They were convinced that there is no such thing. Jesus defeated them at their own game. 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. Jesus scores again and the Sadducees were shut out. Now there is a line change and the Pharisees get back on the ice. They heard what Jesus did to the Sadducees, so they get together to discuss whether they could attack him in a different way.

Way back, many years earlier, the Philistine army chose the giant Goliath to battle the Israelite champion, which turned out to be David. But God was with his threatened people and David was victor. Now Jesus would go against a new kind of Goliath. They picked their smartest scholar of the law, a guy who knows the Torah inside out, and all 613 laws that govern the Jewish people. He doesn't have

a sword but he does have a sharp question: "Which is the greatest of the 613 laws?"

I wonder which law we would say was the greatest or most important. In traffic, I would say it's the law of 'right of way'. Whose turn it is to go is determined by the principle of who has the right of way. The driver with the green light or the one with no stop sign. All the other traffic laws are based on this. No other law means anything if we don't do these things.

Jesus gets the hat trick with his two part answer. Part one is to love God with your whole heart and soul and strength. You can't hold back with God. You can't be lazy. Otherwise, it's not really loving God. That's a special prayer that everyone knew. 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. 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.

But Jesus did not stop there. He went to an entirely different part of the Scriptures to say that there is a second commandment. It is like the first one to love God. It's to love your 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: "You shall not wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Have empathy for others who have suffered like you. Don't ignore them just because they are foreigners. "You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. I will surely heed their cry and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans." So anyone who is poor or in need you have to love. "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.

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.

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

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 tells 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.

Today, as persecution of Christ, his Church and his people increases, the question left unanswered is for each of us. Jesus himself asks it. Will you love God with all of your will and mind? Will you give yourself to him completely. And will you love those whom he loves, your neighbour. Let this passage set the tone for your entire life. It should be obvious but we need to be told again and again to follow God's will. And what is that will but to love. He shares his blessed life with us. God should therefore be the centre of our life. Our whole soul and mind etc. Live your life in such a way that without God it would make no sense. If we love him with everything, then we love what he loves. Let us give it all we have.

Thessalonians

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. This is a very early letter. That church had received the Word of God with joy despite persecution. And, because they are joyful, they do what Paul does. They evangelize. They tell others about Jesus. They are not mediocre or lazy.

Call To Conversion

The biggest problem with Christianity is Christians. The more people I meet the more I love my dog. Love people who are less lovable. We love people because God loves them and we love God.

Being a Christian is hard because it demands everything of us. It's a beautiful calling and the rewards are out of this world. It can bring to us a joy even in this life that nothing else can match. But it's not easy. I feel that too. It's part of my nature to be lazy, to mail it in. That's why many won't walk down that road to follow Christ. He wasn't crucified for being baptized, or for being nice to people. He was crucified for telling people he was God. People will and do dislike us for saying it today.

We are called Christian disciples because we are actively seeking to become like the one we follow and worship. Jesus is God, the Son. He shows us God the Father. He brings to us God the Holy Spirit. He does everything. He gives everything. He does not do those things so we can take it easy, coasting along. He does not offer his whole life for our benefit so that we can be mediocre, just going through the motions half heartedly. To love God with everything we have is to love Jesus and do what he tells us. At the beginning of his ministry, Mary told the servants to do whatever he tells you. They did that and water became wine. That needs to happen in our lives. That will be the question for ourselves, not to trick us, not to defeat us, but so that we can love what God loves? That's our victory.

Key Verses Today

Entrance Antiphon: *Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Turn to the Lord and his strength. Constantly seek his face.*

Collect: *Almighty ever living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command so that we may merit what you promise.*

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 when they cry out to me. My wrath will burn. Your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. If you lend money to my people, 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, in whom I take refuge, the source of my salvation. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised. The Lord lives! Exalted by the God of my salvation. Triumphs he gives to his king & 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. The Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you in every place your faith in God has become known. 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.*