

The Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

June 8, 2022

Today Jesus tells us something that invites us to see the comprehensive simplicity and challenge of the Gospel that he proclaims. He summarizes his whole teaching by declaring that he came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. According to the Catechism, “Jesus acknowledged the Ten Commandments, but he also showed the power of the Spirit at work in their letter” (CCC 2054). Jesus is the living, breathing law of God. God’s divine law was not nullified by Christ’s coming; it was united and perfected in him. He is the new law, which we fulfill through love: St Paul picking up on Jesus’ theme states that the commandments “are all summed up in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love cannot result in any harm to the neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9-10). We can ask ourselves if we seek to fulfill God’s law each day by loving him above all things and loving my neighbors as ourselves.

I have mentioned this before, we see the fulfillment of the Law whenever we look at the crucifix, for here is represented our love for God in the vertical dimension of the cross, our love for neighbour on the horizontal axis and true love of self where the vertical and horizontal meet.

We see what happens when people live counter to the fulfillment of the Law in our Old Testament reading from 1 Kings. For here are presented King Ahab and the 450 prophets of Baal. Here is the first thing we need to be aware of. in a world like this how easy it is for our vertical relationship to become disordered by idolatry. Baal was the god of fertility and war and was depicted iconographically as a bull (a symbol of fertility) and also as a warrior grasping lightning (a symbol of his power over nature).¹ Ahab was the king and was the most influential person in Israel. His endorsement of the Prophets of Baal show us that in a world like this idolatry is always the most popular form of worship. Think for instance in our culture the influence of pornography – the fertility cult of Baal – finds expression, not to mention all of the ways in which our culture celebrates forms of sexual expression that are counter to the sacramental unity of one woman and one man in life long union. Then think of the dominance of violence within our culture, be it the terrible war in Ukraine, the mass shootings that have preoccupied headlines in these past weeks. Everywhere in our modern world the Baal cult is alive and well.

We also see the consequences of this idolatrous worship in the addictive behaviour of the Prophets of Baal who repeatedly cut themselves and work themselves up into a frenzy that is disordered and violent. What we see on display therefore in this part of the story, is how when our relationship with God is disordered it adversely affects our relationships with one another and ourselves.

Contrast the Baal cult with the worship of Elijah. Although he is in the minority his approach is one of trusting confidence in the one true God of Israel. Notice that the first thing he does is

¹ Hahn, S., ed. (2009). In [Catholic Bible Dictionary](#) (p. 84). Doubleday.

repair the altar of the Lord that had been neglected because of the peoples' preoccupation with false worship. He orders worship towards the one who is worthy of worship, Yahweh. Notice as well he gathers twelve stones to affirm that his worship is in continuity with the worship of the 12 Tribes of the People of God. Next we see the trust Elijah displays as he drenches the offering with 12 jars of water and then he prays. In his prayer he also affirms that his worship is in continuity with the worship of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, the patriarchs of God's people. He also affirms that he is the servant of the Lord and that he knows that it is the Lord's desire that the people turn their hearts back to the true God. We are then told that having offered his prayer the offering is consumed by fire and that when the people saw it they fell down and worshipped and twice declared: "The Lord is indeed God, the Lord is indeed God.

The "Lord" is the English translation of the word "Yahweh" the name by which God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. What the people are therefore declaring is that it is this God who is worthy of our worship and not the idolatrous and more popular gods whose chief deity is Baal.

What this story tells us is the following. In a world where there are so many forms of idolatrous worship we are always called to worship at this one true altar, where as a priest I do not call down fire, thankfully, to consume the offering, rather I invoke the Holy Spirit. This is so our Lord Jesus Christ becomes present to us in the Eucharist. When we then consume him we are able to affirm that indeed he the Lord Jesus is God and by his grace and mercy we are learning to conform our lives to his cross, thereby affirming by the way we are living that the fulfillment of the Law is being realized in us.