

THIRTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, OCT 31, 2021, YEAR B

**The Law of the Kingdom: Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor.**

Endeavoring to share the gospel about Jesus Christ, the evangelists presented various stories relating what Jesus said and did. In the past few Sundays, our Lord answered questions on different topics like what one must do to inherit eternal life and what makes for greatness in his kingdom. The latter was occasioned by the request of James and John to sit one on his right and the other on his left in the kingdom. In the gospel last Sunday, our Lord opened the eyes of Bartimaeus, a blind man. This Sunday, he presented the supreme law of his kingdom. This law of love is indispensable in knowing who Jesus is.

When a scribe asked Jesus which is the first of all the commandments, our Lord gave this answer. "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:28-31). Jesus led his interrogators into the Word of God. In one fell swoop, he brought together Deuteronomy 6:4-5, [the *Shema*] and Leviticus 19:18. In doing so, he summarized the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Looking closely into the Decalogue, one cannot fail to notice that Commandments 1 through 3 center on God while commandments 4 through 10 center on man. One should strive to keep all the commandments. The commandments, however, are not mere legalisms but love because they flow from the One who is Love. "The Lord is faithful in all his words and loving in all his deeds. The Lord supports all who fall and raises all who are bowed down." (Psalm 145:13-14)

The structure of the Decalogue reveals that the love of God empowers, ennobles, and sanctifies the love of neighbor. Trying to love people or humanity without any reference to God is to be like that rich young man who abandoned the kingdom because the Lord told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor. (Mark 10:17-24). Such love is like a decapitated body. It does not stand the test of time. It may be philanthropism, but never true charity. On the other hand, trying to love God without loving God's children is mere fanaticism and can lead to violence in the name of religion. It is an incomplete love.

Is it humanly possible to love God and neighbor? Some of us may say that it is easier to love God than to love people. There may be an element of truth to that because some people may pose a real challenge to our attempts to love them.

However, the Scriptures warn that, "If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20). It may be difficult to love someone who is attacking you or mistreating your loved ones, but it is not impossible. If we love only those who love us or who are good to us, we are no better than heathens. The Lord says, "For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same?" (Matthew 5:46). In order for our love be Godlike, Jesus teaches us to love our so-called enemies: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45).

On the other hand, some people may say that they can love people and not God. We all know that such love is at best limited and at worst manipulative. It is not befitting of human beings and deprives both the one who gives it and the one who receives it of true love.

The Lord Jesus shows that it is possible to love in a complete sense. He loves God his Father and he loves each one of us as if we are the only one he made. His love for the Father is expressed in his obedience to the will of the Father and in laying down his life for us (John 10:17). In sum, the Lord is our model and yardstick for love. He clearly enjoins us, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

What do you gain by keeping the commandment of the Lord, by loving God and your neighbor? Love assures happiness here and in the hereafter. We are wired for love and love fosters our physiological, psychological, and spiritual well-being. The Word of God says, "You must keep his statutes and commandments which I command you today, that you and your children after you may prosper, and that you may have a long life on the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you forever." (Deuteronomy 4:40).

As God's people drew closer to the Promised Land, Moses reiterated this Lord's ordinance for the benefit of all, especially for those who would be tempted to pick and choose what to obey and what not to obey. "Be careful, therefore, to do as the LORD, your God, has commanded you, not turning aside to the right or to the left, but following exactly the way that the LORD, your God,

commanded you that you may live and prosper, and may have long life in the land which you are to possess” (Deuteronomy 5:32-33).

More importantly, loving as the Lord commands brings us into union with God. The Lord says, “Whoever loves me will keep my word ... and my father will love him and we will come to him” (John 14:23). The way of love is to choose life. Rejecting the way of love is to choose death. To love God and to love our neighbor is a life-giving response to God who loved us first.