

Lectio Divina of 30th Sunday – A

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. “Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you” (Is 49:15) Yes Father, such is your infinite love for us despite how we sometimes act or think. Thank You for helping us to be more loving and compassionate towards others. Glorious Father, as Your dear children, we commit to loving You with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds. This is the greatest and most important commandment of all. In the same Spirit, we also commit to loving our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to not deceive ourselves by thinking we are walking in love while forgetting to love other human beings whom you have created in your own image of divinity. Help us to truly put You first in our lives, and to esteem others better than ourselves and finally ourselves. Holy Spirit, show us how to truly love the Father with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

First reading: A reading from the book of Exodus Ex 20:20-26 Thus says the Lord: “You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans. “If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.” (The word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)

Commentary: The first reading explains the second greatest commandment, namely, loving one’s neighbors, especially the underprivileged. The chosen people of Israel should remember that once they were aliens in the land of Egypt. Just as God protected them and treated them kindly, so they are to protect others and treat them with kindness. Thus, they should become a humane society rooted in the basic religious concept of loving God living in their neighbor.

Responsorial psalm 18 I love you, Lord, my strength

I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!
Praised be the Lord, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies. R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The Lord lives and blessed be my rock! Extolled be God my savior. You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed. R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Second Reading: A Reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians 1:5-10 Brothers and sisters: You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth,

so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath. (The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)

Commentary: In the second reading, St. Paul congratulates the Thessalonians on the positive effects of their example of loving one another as Jesus had commanded them to do. Their mutual love and their loving reception of Paul and response to his preaching attracted many more people to know Christ.

Gospel: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew 22: 34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ).

Meditation on the Gospel: The Pharisees were quite knowledgeable about law and ritual requirements. They spent life time practice to study the 613 commandments of the Old Testament along with the numerous rabbinic commentaries and thus they were very proud people and considered themselves superior to ordinary folk and their very name "Pharisee" means "one who stands apart" from simple and ordinary people. They tested Jesus to see whether he correctly understood the law as they did. But Jesus exposed their pride in public with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose.

Deut 6:4- 5 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" This is known as Shema in the Old Testament. Shema in Hebrew means Hear. This is the profession of their faith. All their prayers begin with this Shema. Modern Jews recite this prayer both in the morning and evening. Every Jewish child is expected to memorize this prayer. Every Jew has to love God, think constantly about his commandments, teach his commandments to children and they used to tie this on their hands and bind them on their foreheads. We read in Deut 6:6-9 "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates". This shows their sincere love for God. Why all heart, all soul and all mind? The adjective 'all' is an emphasis that our love for God should be full, whole, sincere and undivided with full person. He adds another commandment from Lev 19:18 "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself".

How to apply Jesus' two fold love message in our life? We fulfill the intention of the 10 commandments and other OT commandments only when we love God and our neighbors. Participations in the Eucharistic celebrations, Prayer before the blessed Sacrament, Praying the Holy

Rosary, Frequenting the sacrament of Confession, Attending different novenas and involving in various pious activities are very important and they show that we are religious minded people or pious people. However, We need to go from this stage of piety to the stage of spirituality. All our external religious practices should motivate us to express our love, concern, affection, respect and justice. Piety is external and spirituality is internal and the Lord is expecting us to be spiritual people and not merely pious or religious people.

St. Augustine's famous Latin quote is this "Ama Deum et Fac Quod Vis" which means "Love God and Do what you want". If we truly love God, we will truly love our brothers and sisters without any prejudice or partiality. We will be makers of peace and harmony. We will create culture of unity and charity. We will not misuse or violate the rights of others. Unfortunately in our times, at times we hear of some radical religious groups, tarnishing the image of religion by killing the innocents in the name of religion. They are not only anti religion but also anti human. This kind of radicalism is against the very fundamentals of any religion which is to glorify God and sanctify human beings.

Is there any contradiction between our belief and life? The Lord expects us to love Him above all with all heart, all soul, all mind and all strength and show our Christian love to our brothers and sisters irrespective of religion, color and code and thus we become agents of his love and mercy. If we are God's children, then we are expected to love every human being as He/ She is God's image. We must love God and express that love in action by loving our brothers and sisters. Our Love for God and our love for Human beings must go hand in hand. Vertical Love of God and Horizontal love of human beings are very essential for any faith, all the more for our Christian faith and practices and that is why we read in 1 John 4:20 "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen"

Concluding prayer: Father, You have asked us to continue to love one another, for love comes from You. Anyone who loves is Your child and knows You. Those who do not love do not know You, for You are love. You have shown how much You loved us by sending Your one and only Son, Jesus, into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. Loving Father, In a world turn apart by fear and suspicion, teach us your children that Love is the only means to conquer fear: Lord Jesus, in a world full of anger and frustration, teach us, your servants, your friends, your sisters and your brothers, to overturn the tables and tear down the fences Which turn away the hungry and homeless and to care for the strangers. Holy Spirit, Mother of Wisdom, teach us, your children, to be caring for one another, to protect one another as you gather the nations under the feathers of your wings. Trinitarian God, we confess that we will love You with all of our hearts, souls, strength and minds, and we will love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Forgive us for not loving and caring for all people. Forgive us for holding grudges and remembering old debts. Forgive us for judging others before getting to know them. Forgive us for being proud, impatient, stubborn, rebellious, or jealous. Help us to receive your love this week and extend your love to our neighbors. Awaken our hearts to pray for our neighbors and show us how to love our neighbors the way you love them. (Hail Mary/Blessings)