

HOMILY for 30th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about Commandments; reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A Sunday school teacher was teaching the Ten Commandments to her pre-school class. After explaining the 4th Commandment of "Honor thy father & mother," she asked, "Is there a Commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers & sisters?"

Without missing a beat, one little girl answered, "Thou shall not kill!"

Anyway, a lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?" Anyone who asks that question either wants to learn more about religious law & its greatest Commandment or tries to use it to trap the responder. We were told that the lawyer wanted to use that question to trap Jesus. As you might know, the Jews have had hundreds of religious laws to guide them through their faith life & ritual celebrations. Evidently each Rabbi could come up with his own teachings & create his own religious laws. That's why there are all kinds of religious laws in Judaism. I heard about that in my Scriptures class in the seminary, but never believed it. Then, a few weeks ago I was invited to East Kentwood High School to be on the Board of World Religions & share with its students about our Catholic faith. I was able to hear a young Jew talk about his Jewish faith & confirm that his religion has numerous religious laws that cover issues from loving God to observing the Sabbath. Anyhow, Jesus knew all about the Jewish laws & also realized which ones are the most important religious laws concerning God & neighbors. He was able to satisfy the lawyer's questioning & come up with the perfect answer saying that "... [loving God and loving one's neighbors is how] the whole law [of Jewish faith] was based, & the prophets as well."

But, Jesus' answer was not just a great response to the cunning lawyer & a perfect summary to all the Jewish laws & teachings of the prophets. It was also a solid foundation for His newly-founded Christian faith. Like in last Sunday's Gospel, which He was able to use the civic duty of tax to remind the Jewish public about their religious responsibility to God, Jesus takes the opportunity this Sunday to tell His followers about the two most important Commandments in His Jewish tradition as well as Christian faith. Many of us Christians often cite Moses' Ten Commandments as the basis for our Christian living; but according to this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus really wants us to follow & live up to His Two Commandments of love. Those Commandments might look & sound simple; but they are quite difficult to practice in real life. I had an opportunity at a parish school to ask the children at a school Mass about the two Commandments of love & how they felt about them. Most of them said that those Commandments are very hard to follow every day. But, they all agreed that loving their neighbors is much more challenging than loving God. For their neighbors can be handful for them to deal with & get along.

Realizing how challenging it is for someone to love his/her neighbors especially foreigners & aliens, this Sunday's First Reading has this advice & challenge to the people of God as following, "You shall not molest an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If you ever wrong them & they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, & I will kill you with the sword... 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... If they cry out to me, I will hear them; for I am compassionate.” There you have it! The Lord wants us to be compassionate like He is & try to treat our neighbors, widows, orphans, & aliens with care & kindness. We should not let our politicians tell us how to treat our neighbors because of their political points of views or deal with aliens/immigrants because of their immigration status. Otherwise, they will cry out to God & the Lord will hear them & punish then for it.

In case we need a role model or encouraging example, this Sunday’s Second Reading has the following message to tell us: “You know as well as we do what we proved to be like when, while still among you, we acted on your behalf. You, in turn, became imitators of us & of the Lord, receiving His word despite great trials, with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. Thus you became a model for all the believers of Macedonia & Achaia.” It continues, “...The people of those parts are reporting what kind of reception we had from you & how you turned to God from idols, to serve Him who is the living& true God.” Evidently the people God in Thessalonica looked up to Paul & the early disciples to live out their Christian life despite great trials every day. They turned away from idols & bad habits & embraced the Lord Jesus & a life of virtues. They joyfully served the living God in Christ & became a great inspiration to the new converts in Macedonia & Achaia. Indeed, the Thessalonians truly lived up to Jesus’ two Commandments of love & inspired others to do the same. I’m sure He was very proud of them & their Christian living.

My dear brothers & sisters, which Commandment or Law in our Christian faith is the greatest to you? Like the Jewish laws & teachings back then, we are now filled up with all sorts of church teachings & religious doctrines. Many Christians of our time are confused & lost by the number of church teachings & religious doctrines like the Jews were in Jesus’ time. They cannot tell which Commandment is the greatest one in the twenty-first century. Hopefully Jesus’ answer in this Sunday’s Gospel reminds us what matters the most to our Lord & helps us live up to it every day instead of getting distracted by all the political & social issues of our time.