

31st Sunday in the Ordinary Time B

■ **November 4, 2018**

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THE COMMANDMENTS TO LOVE

I. THE READINGS

■ **1st Reading:** Deut 6,2-6

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■ 2 Moses spoke to the people, saying: Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. 3 Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! 5 Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.

■ **FOCUS: Obeying the Commandments**

Commentary

- The opening salvo is Fear the Lord. (v. 2). This comes first, then the keeping of the commandments.
- Obedience to the statutes and commandments is 24 hours. No break (vacation) from the law.
- Vv.2-3 present the reasons for keeping the law:
 - To have long life (v.2)
 - To grow and prosper more (v.3)
 - To have the land flowing with m and h. (as promised)
- V. 4 repeats v.3: "Hear, O Israel"
- V.4 explicitates the commandments of God and gives the quality with which to be kept: with whole heart, soul, and strength.

- Reflections on the 1st reading
- God is a law-giver.
- He demands all that we are and have, when doing his commandments.
- No haphazard doing of the commandments.
- We don't select the laws we follow. All the laws must be kept seriously.
- God promise is great and abundant: long life, land, offsprings, material well-being.
- God is emphatic on keeping his commandments.
- His words give life and prosperity (greatest gifts).
- We attain God's promises, if we follow the law.
- Lawlessness (violations, half-hearted performance of the law) = no long life, no land, no prosperity.

■ **2nd Reading:** Hebrews 7,23-28

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- 23 Those priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, 24 but he, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. 25 Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. 26 It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. 27 He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

■ **FOCUS: The Priesthood of Christ**

Commentary

- The priesthood of Christ is forever. No need for many priests as in OT. (v.23)
- Jesus is a priest forever (v.24), saves, always interceding for us. (v.25)
- No need to replace him because he does not die.
- Jesus as priest is holy, innocent, undefiled; the OT priesthood is opposite. Jesus' services are not repetitious. (v. 27)
- The priests under law (OT) were imperfect. Jesus, not subject to the law, was perfect. (v.28)

Reflections on the 2nd reading

- The reading is a continuation of the reflection of the author on the priesthood of Christ.
- His is efficacious.
- His is decisive (once and for all).
- His is not repetitious.
- His actions are salvific.
- His is one and only (unlike in OT, because the priests died one after the other.)
- The reading stresses the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood, which is not reduplicated; not a copy of the old.

Gospel Reading: Mark 12,28b-34

The question and the answer

- 28 One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"
- 29 Jesus replied,
 - "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! 30 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'
 - 31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The repetition of the answer and an addition

- 32 The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.'
 - 33 And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength,
 - and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."
- 34 And when Jesus saw that (he) answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.
- **FOCUS: The Commandments to Love**

Commentary

- Vv.28-31 talks about the commandments of love.
- It is two-directional:
 - Vertical "Love the Lord," v.30 (from Dt 6,4-5)
 - Horizontal "Love your neighbor, also yourself, v.31" (from Lv 19,18)
- The commandments require quality in loving God and others (with your whole heart, mind, etc.)
- To love one's neighbor, you consider them as yourself.
- Vv.32-33 somehow repeats what Jesus has stated and adds "worth more than all burnt offerings..."
- Loving takes precedence over rituals.
- Reflections on the gospel reading
- Loving as a commandment of God eradicates the idea that you love only when you feel like loving or when you like God or the other person.
- To love is a tall order from God. The commandment to love defies emotionalism, romanticism... it is a divine imperative.
- We have no choice but to love God and neighbor.
- Love must be wholehearted, undivided, concentrated, 100%, without withholding anything, etc.
- There is no such thing as effortless love; there is no love without energy and time spent.
- Love is not possible without taking care of yourself; without self-respect and self-confidence, self-knowledge.
- Loving God and others are better than prayers (holocaust and burn offerings), novenas, processions and other rituals.
- God prefers love to religious and spiritual activities that do not render justice to him and neighbors.

II. TYING THE READINGS

- The First Reading is about the keeping of the commandments. (Shema Israel)
- The Second Reading talks about the high priesthood of Christ, above the law (Mosaic law).
- The Gospel Reading talks about the commandment of love, similar to the first reading.

- How to develop your homily
- Begin by relating your observations on us Filipinos (or other nationalities if you know them) who do not give so much damn to laws, rules and regulations. When we talk about the law or enforcing it, we are accused of being legalistic. We are happy when we break the law without being caught.
- The readings tell us that we take seriously God's commandments.
 - In the first reading, if we read further, we are informed that the Israelites are obliged to recite the Shema always to remind them of the one God and his commandments and to teach them to their children and to their children's children... The purpose: to possess the land...
 - The second reading somehow talks of another law. The high priesthood of Christ is different from the high priesthood of the OT; Christ's high priesthood is not limited or strangled by the ritual laws of Israel. Yet Christ's high priesthood that conforms to God's law (obedience to the Father) brings about salvation and liberation.
 - The gospel reading is unequivocal in reiterating the commandment to love God and neighbor. There are no if's and but's. The commandment is categorically stated and there is no margin for misinterpretation.
- To love or not to love is not the question, but how to love.
- We can debate whether we obey the laws of the land (laws made by humans) or not, we may question their legality or morality, leading us not to take them seriously. But with this law, no debate is possible.
- Our love should not be selective, discriminatory, partial, exclusive and time bound. It has no expiry date. It is never *panis, sira*, (spoiled). It should not have boundaries.
- Our love should be embracing all, exciting, discovering, integrating, forgiving, etc. In our love we include our in-laws and people in our house who are difficult to love.
- We must take care / take pains to love rather than to make beautiful decorations to our churches and favorite saints. The parishioners must decide where to better put their money: catechism, livelihood, feeding and scholarship programs. Flowers and decorations are secondary only.
- The eucharist is a sign of God's love for all of us. In the eucharist, Jesus is showing us how to love. He is giving himself totally to us (his wholeness, strength, mind), his humanity, his divinity and all that he stand for. He is not choicy. He welcomes rich and poor alike who humbly seek his pardon and salvation. The eucharist is a sacrament of love.

- Our Context