30th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 2020

The story is told about a hospital chaplain, who while making his rounds one day, chanced upon a lawyer sitting on his bed, reading the Bible intently. When the chaplain asked him what he was doing, the lawyer replied: “*Cramming Father, and looking for loopholes!*”

The gospel today reminds us to love God with all our strength. In other words, we are supposed to love God to the max. We all must be busy loving Him as much as we can. If we do so, there will be no need to cram. Fulfilling the basic minimum requirement is not enough. The two commandments to love God to the max & to love one’s neighbor as one’s self - should not be seen from the legalistic point of view. Rather, the decision to love God & neighbor should be seen as a personal response to God’s love.

We have been reflecting on **Love,** as the real direction & orientation of human life. We find the fulfillment of our lives in love.

In the 1st reading from Exodus, God commands the Israelites to love their neighbor, “*surprising neighbor*” namely the aliens, outsiders, the widows, orphans & the poor. These people should not be considered as ‘*others*’, in the sense that ‘*we*’ have nothing in common. In other words no discrimination or distinction. God tells the Israelites these people should remind you of who you are. You should see your past event, you should show your longings in them, and so love them. It is God’s desire.

In the 2nd reading, St. Paul in his letter to the Thesallonians exudes love for the neighbor. He manifests his love for the Thesallonians in the area of their faith life, which they should not neglect which corporal acts of love will remain necessary & indispensable. We should not forget to care for the spiritual needs of people at the same time attending their physical needs. This is an important aspect of loving our neighbor.

In the gospel, this becomes clearer, coming from Jesus himself. Unfortunately, just like the past Sundays, the gospel passage starts with rather of a bad intention on the part of the Pharisee. They would trap Jesus again. And this time thru an expert of the law, a lawyer. If you are asked about a law by a lawyer, well, you can’t beat of a trick. You can either be trapped, be tricked then you can make a fool of yourself.

And the question is tricky. “*Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?*” If you were Jesus, you would really get confused. Remember that during the time of Jesus, in Hebrew scripture & with a lot of commentaries, they were able to count around 613 commandments, precepts & prohibitions. But Jesus claimed, that *He did not come to abolish the law & prophets but to fulfill it*. It means that Jesus knows all about the commandment is.

Let’s bear in mind, commandments coming from God are not just prohibitions, but they are God’s way of orienting the human heart.

Let us admit my dear brothers & sisters, our human heart has so many desires, plans & dreams. And some of these desires, plans & dreams are conflicting with each other & we even have no understanding how these dreams, plans & desires are in present in our hearts. Most of the times, they do not agree with one another.

So, how do we put order in all of them? How do we find the real direction that our hearts are looking for? And what’s the purpose of the commandments from God. They are not strictly speaking just prohibitions, they are also positive prescriptions and are in a way of orienting our hearts towards the real goal in life.

So, let us not look at commandments negatively. They are our help to our broken & even confused hearts. Knowing that, the commandment is all about of allowing the human person to reach the real destination & purpose in life.

To put it this way, the commandments are like ‘road signs’, guides or reminder, as we go along on our journey towards the destination, the heart of God the Father, our Creator. What is the main road? It’s the ‘*personal & intimate love relationship with God, to our neighbor & our very self.*’

1st, Jesus quote from Deutoronomy, “*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, & with all your mind. This is the greatest & the 1st commandment*. You shall love your God, you are not being told to love an idea or ideology, nor someone unknown, like the atheists & communists. You love your God who liberate & created you. The God who said, ‘*I am your God, and you are my people’*. This is an absolute & universal truth which is non-negotiable.

“*The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.*” You should be also oriented with your neighbor in love and the norm is: *what you do to yourself, you should be ready to do for your neighbor because your neighbor is your own too*. See yourself in neighbor.

And Jesus brings these 2 commandments: 1 from Deutoronomy, 1 from Leviticus by bringing them together. Jesus is telling us the orientation of our life, & the direction of our life is in love.

This simplifies life. This commandment if heeded, will not only purify us, it will also lead us to true joy and the true direction that God intended for us. It will lead us to the fulfillment of the longings in our hearts.

Kindly, continue your reflections, when you pray, with the help with these points: The 1st point is: *How can I make God the true goal in my life?* 2nd point: *How can I see myself in my neighbor?*