

30th Sunday-Year A

Ex. 22:20-26

Psalm 18

1 Thes. 1: 5-10

Matt. 22:34-40

### **It is Impossible to Love Others if We Don't Love God**

Beloved, I have a little friend in Ames, who is about ten years old. I have known her and the family for the past five years, but she only began to like me a few months ago. She always avoided me and would tell me in the face, "I don't like you!" As you can imagine, her parents always felt very bad when she did that and apologized on her behalf. But recently, I was on a Zoom call with the family, and she ran to the camera and shouted, "I love you!" That surprised the parents and me! So I asked: "Why do you love me today? What did I do right?-)?" Her response was, "*I decided to like you because my Dad loves you*" My Little friend was telling me, left to her, she would not really care about me; but she decided to show her gratitude and love for her dad by caring about what her dad cares about: Me. She was just extending her love for her dad to me.

Beloved, I think that is what God is asking us to do in our scriptural readings today. In the gospel, our Lord Jesus reminds us that the goal of true religion is not just how much you know about God, though that is important, but most importantly, how much love you have for God and others. In the days of Jesus, the Jewish leaders had developed more than 600 laws from the Ten Commandments. The rabbis often debated which of these laws was the greatest. Usually, those debates were to show off and test how much a rabbi knew about God. A good rabbi was seen as one who could remember all these 600-plus laws and teach them to the people. These leaders took pride in how much they knew about God. So they came to test Jesus to see how much he knew about God. As usual, Jesus knew their intention but used the occasion as a teaching moment. He tells them that the goal of true religion is not just how much you know about God, but rather, how much love you have for God and others. Beloved, loving God with all your mind, your heart, and your soul means that God will, at times, call you to love him in people you might not care about or people you might even strongly dislike. But that precisely is how God wants us to show our love for him. To show our gratitude and love for God by extending the love we have received from him to all those he cares about, all of humanity and created things.

In our first reading, God is telling us, if you love me then show it in the way you treat others, especially the widow and widower, the orphan, the poor, and those you consider foreigners. God loves all, but he has a preferential love for the poor, the widow/widower, the orphan, and people who are most vulnerable. They need us the most. This is how the early church understood Christianity and lived it. That explains why St. Paul, in the second reading, is praising the Church in Thessalonica for accepting God's friendship and extending that friendship to him, Paul, his companions, and others who needed help in Macedonia and Achaia.

Beloved, the truth of the human condition is that there are might be people in our family, workplace, community, school, even church that we might not really like or want to have anything to do with. However, Christianity is a call to become a friend of God and extend that friendship to other friends of God. As we ponder today's readings, let us ask ourselves: Whom do I find most difficult to love? Can you imagine how beautiful our world would be if we can all make that transition my little friend from Ames made? To be able to tell someone, "I don't like you, but I have decided to love you because my Heavenly Father loves you!" May Christ open our eyes to see as he sees and to love as he loves!