

Bible Study

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Good and gracious God, we place ourselves in the awareness of your presence and ask you to send your Holy Spirit to guide us through this time of reflection and prayer. May we come to know you more fully and be more faithful disciples. We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Each of us has some ability that we use almost without effort; it just comes naturally to us. What are some of those abilities that you have noticed in yourself or in others?
2. Does being compassionate come naturally for you or do you have to work at it?

Commentary before the First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:10-14

“Deuteronomy” means “second law.” The book was written after the Hebrew people had lived in the Promised Land for several centuries and had experienced how difficult it was to be faithful to their special, unique covenant with God when they were surrounded by tribes with all sorts of interesting pagan rituals, some of which were quite attractive (in a sinful way). The writer retold many of the highlights from the first 4 books of the Bible, and restated the giving of the Law and the covenant in a way that called the people back to faithfulness, reassuring them of God’s mercy.

Read the First Reading aloud. Beginning with verse 8 might help to clarify the rest.

1. Who is presented as speaking the words of this reading? (see chapter 29:1)
2. The knowledge of right and wrong, of good and evil is, to some extent, already within us. It is called “the Natural Law.” Give several examples of actions that would violate the Natural Law.
3. What extent do we have to learn about God and God’s laws, beyond what is instinctive in the Natural Law?
4. Besides the Natural Law, what other way did the Hebrew people already have of knowing what God desired?
5. If God’s law was already “in your mouths,” what should the people have been doing already?
6. And if God’s law was already “in your hearts,” what should they have been doing already?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

This weekend we begin a series of readings from Saint Paul’s letter to the Church at Colossae, which like Galatia was also in modern-day Turkey. Although Saint Paul had not established the Christian community there, the members had requested that he help them to refocus on the Truths of the faith, for they were being pressured by new teachers to accept a number of questionable doctrines. After the customary greetings (verses 1-8) and assurances of his prayers for them, Saint Paul begins his teaching in verse 15. That is where we start the reading.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Who is the “he” spoken of in verse 15?
2. List the doctrinal beliefs about Jesus that Saint Paul outlined in this passage.
3. By which act did Jesus make possible the reconciliation of things in this world with the things of God?
4. Sacred Scripture refers in various places to 9 groups (called “ranks”) of angels: cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, virtues, principalities, powers, archangels, and (guardian) angels. The Colossians were being pressured to adopt certain rituals that would have honored angels as if they had had a role in creation. In light of that, explain the point about angels that Saint Paul was trying to make in verse 16.

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Both Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospels also relate this story of the young lawyer who came to Jesus asking what he had to do to gain eternal life. Only Luke follows that account with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The point of the story is not in the avoidance of the nearly-dead man by the priest and the Levite, who would have thought they had excellent reasons to excuse themselves in this situation, in order not to become ritually unclean by touching a bloody body, which would have prevented them from fulfilling their duties at the temple until after they had been purified according to Jewish law. They were hoping someone else would come along and care for the injured man. The point is about the meaning of “neighbor” and whether non-believers can be good.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which verse in the first reading is similar to Jesus' response to the lawyer's question?
2. As a religious lawyer, the man already knew exactly who was included as "neighbor" under God's covenant; it was written in the Law. So, what might have been his reason for asking, "Who is my neighbor?"
3. What made the Samaritan a good neighbor?
4. Why was that, for the Jews, a shocking example for Jesus to use? (for help, see 2 Kings 17:24-41)
5. Besides the 4 main characters in the parable, who else in the story was also a good neighbor?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, to what degree would you say our society is a compassionate one? Explain your answer.
2. Is compassion a part of the Natural Law? Or is it a virtue that we must learn from God?
3. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to decide how to respond to someone that our society tries, by and large, to avoid if possible? How did you decide what to do?
4. Which is easier – remembering the 10 Commandments or remembering to love God and to love everyone else?
5. Explain how keeping the 2 commandments in the Great Law will include keeping all of the Ten Commandments as well. Go through each commandment, one by one. (Deuteronomy 6:5-21, if you need a reminder)
6. What can we learn from and imitate in those who are different from us in some way?
7. Does the Gospel reading in some way challenge a deeply engrained attitude that you have?

Closing Prayer

God our Father, you are the fullness of compassion and mercy, and your law of love requires us to strive to be like you. Let the light of your truth guide us on the path of holy living and help us to reject what is contrary to the command to love as you do. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Sign of the Cross)