

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year

C

Dt 30:10-14

Ps 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

or

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 11

Col 1:15-20

Lk 10:25-37

Christopher J. Drennen, O.S.A.

“It is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.”

Moses tells the people about the nearness of God in their lives. He brings the God of Mount Sinai and the God of the Law into the hearts of the people. This is the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ. Not a distant God who is hard to know, but a near and loving God who wants to be our source of strength and salvation. This is the God we seek and this is the God who walks with us each day.

The scholar in the Gospel story today wants to know God but he is filled with questions and seeks absolute theological answers. He seems convinced that if he just knew a bit more, had more questions answered, he would indeed find the peace he is seeking. Jesus of course prompts him to remember the teachings of Moses who build

everything on love; the love of God and the love of our neighbor. It is a simple and direct answer that is correct, but Jesus knows that the scholar has not taken his "knowledge" and turned it into life.

Knowing the truth in words alone does not make us Christians. Living the truth in action is what transforms the words into the Word, and the real presence of Jesus in our lives.

By telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is challenging the scholar to keep the core of faith, the law of love, and let it permeate the customs and practices of the religious life of the day. The law of the scholars had many rules and regulations and would never have been allowed to take care of the stranger who was different and isolated. It would break the religious traditions, so the priest and the Levite (of the priestly class) could not help. But the Samaritan was not wrapped up in the religious laws, just the law of love that transcends all laws. He was not bound by tradition to choose the rules over compassion and love. It takes a stranger, a foreigner, a Samaritan to show how to live what the Scholar knew in his head but had not brought to his heart.

It is that small journey from head to heart that truly transforms us. It is a reminder to all religious people like us who worship God and read the scripture and follow out traditions as well as we can. We always need to see the truth behind and beneath our traditions and customs and keep rooted in those fundamental truths of love and compassion, forgiveness and mercy. It is only when the love of God, that is so close to us, remains the center of our lives do any religious tradition and custom make sense.

This call to universal love is not of course a call to abandon law and traditions. Our ancestors in faith have shown us the way of how to live this life of love. The moral traditions and church practices that we have inherited are the result of thousands of years of experience of

living the law of love. All of our traditions are based on what works best for us to keep walking with the Lord. We are not left to recreate the wheel or the church or the world all by ourselves. As Moses says, it is here for us right here and now, we can grasp the rich traditions that have worked so well and live the life of love and peace that God wants for us. The challenge we face is to see the deeper meaning, the whole picture and not get caught up in the letter of the law and miss the spirit completely.

We hear a lot these days about the church practices of Pre-Vatican II and the approval of a freer use of the old rites. It is not a call to "better" or "right", and those who choose other styles of worship are not any more correct. It is a reminder that there is no "one" way to worship. The key is how we open our hearts to God. The key of all good religion is that it is open to any tool that will enhance the journey. If one prays better in English; Wonderful! If one prays better in Latin; Great! I worked in Los Angeles for the past 7 years and regularly presided at Spanish Speaking Masses. Although many, if not most participants understood English, they prayed best in Spanish. This was the best tool for them to hear the word of God deep in their hearts and minds and strength and being.

Some Catholics find these different styles of liturgy to be causing division. This could be true if we think each one group has all the right answers. We are called to be open to the Spirit of God who is beyond language, custom, theological style, ethnic or economic background. We celebrate the call to be catholic and universal, to be diverse and unified.

We all are called to celebrate our traditions without bypassing the love of Love that calls each of us to be good Samaritans. This Love, this Spirit, this Jesus, this God who is Love calls us to open our hearts each moment and allow the love in our hearts to be carried out into

the world we live. Without that, we cease to be Christian and remain just religious.