



Living the Gospel



Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time — July 11, 2010

Theme: "Your words, Lord are Spirit and life; you have the words of eternal life."

Gathering Prayer

All: God our Father, your truth guides us to the way of Christ. May all who follow him reject what is contrary to the gospel. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 10:25-37

²⁵ There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." ²⁹ But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³² Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³³ But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. ³⁴ He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' ³⁶ Which of these

three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" ³⁷ He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Gospel Notes

25-28. Our Lord's teaching is that the way to attain eternal life is through faithful fulfillment of the Law of God. The Ten Commandments, which God gave Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex 20:1-17), express the natural law in a clear and concrete way. It is part of Christian teaching that the natural law exists, that it is participation by rational creatures in the Eternal Law and that it is impressed on the conscience of every man when he is created by God (cf. Leo XIII, *Libertas praestantissimum*). Obviously, therefore, the natural law, expressed in the Ten Commandments, cannot change or become outdated, for it is not dependent on man's will or on changing circumstances.

In this passage Jesus praises and accepts the summary of the Law given by the Jewish scribe. This reply, taken from Deuteronomy (6:4ff), was a prayer which the Jews used to say frequently. Our Lord gives the very same reply when he is asked which is the principle commandment of the Law and concludes by saying, "On these two commandments depend all the law and prophets." (Mt 22:40; cf. also Rom 13:8-9; Gal 5:14).

There is a hierarchy and order in these two commandments constituting the double precept of charity: before everything and above everything comes loving God in himself; in the second place, and as a consequence of the first commandment, comes loving one's neighbor, for God explicitly requires us to do so (1 Jn 4:21).

This passage of the Gospel also includes another basic doctrine: the Law of God is not something negative—"Do not do this"—but something completely positive—love. Holiness, to which all baptized people are called, does not consist in not sinning, but in loving, in doing positive things, in bearing fruit in the form of love of God. When our Lord describes for us the Last Judgment he stresses this positive aspect of the Law of God (Mt 25:31-46). The reward of eternal life will be given to those who do good.

27. "Yes, our only occupation here on earth is that of loving God—that is, to start doing what we will be doing for all eternity. Why must we love God? Well, because our happiness consists in loving

God; it can consist in nothing else. So, if we do not love God, we will always be unhappy; and if we wish to enjoy any consolation and relief in our pains, we will attain only by recourse to love of God. If you want to be convinced of this, go and find the happiest man according to the world; if he does not love God, you will in fact find an unhappy man. And, on the contrary, if you discover the man most unhappy in the eyes of the world, you will see that because he loves God he is happy in every way. On my God! Open the eyes of our souls and we will seek our happiness where we truly can find it" (St John Vianney, *Selected Sermons*, Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost).

29-37. In this moving parable, which only St Luke gives us, our Lord explains very graphically who our neighbor is and how we should show charity towards him, even if he is our enemy.

Following other Fathers, St Augustine (*De verbis Domini sermons*, 37) identifies the good Samaritan with our Lord, and the waylaid man with Adam, the source and symbol of all fallen mankind. Moved by compassion and piety, he comes down to earth to cure man's wounds, making them his own (Is 53:4; Mt 8:17; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 Jn 3:5). In fact, we often see Jesus being moved by man's suffering (cf. Mt 9:36; Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13). And St John says: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us. That God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn 4:9-11)

This parable leaves no doubt about who our neighbor is-anyone (without distinction of race or relationship) who needs our help; nor about how we should love him-by taking pity on him, being compassionate towards his spiritual and corporal needs; and it is not just a matter of having a right feelings towards him: we must do something, we must generously serve him.

Christians, who are disciples of Christ, should share his love and compassion, never distancing themselves from others' needs. One way to express love for one's neighbor is to perform "works of mercy", which get their name from the fact that they are not duties in justice. There are fourteen such works, seven spiritual and seven corporal. The spiritual are: To convert the sinner; To instruct the ignorant; To counsel the doubtful; To comfort the sorrowful; To bear wrongs patiently; To forgive injuries; To pray for the living and the dead. The corporal works are; To feed the hungry; To give drink to the thirsty; To clothe the naked; To shelter the homeless;

To visit the sick; To visit the imprisoned and To bury the dead.

31-32. Very probably one reason why our Lord used this parable was to correct one of the excesses of false piety common among his contemporaries. According to the Law of Moses, contact with dead bodies involved legal impurity, from which one was cleansed by various ablutions (cf. Num 19:11-12; Lev 21:1-4, 11-12). These regulations were not meant to prevent people from helping the injured; they were designed for reasons of hygiene and respect for the dead. The aberration of the priest and the Levite in this parable consisted in this: they did not know for sure whether the man who had been assaulted was dead or not, and they preferred to apply a wrong interpretation of a secondary, ritualistic precept of the Law rather than obey the more important commandment of loving one's neighbor and giving him whatever help one can.

Gospel Reflection

"How far is it to the moon?" children like to ask. We could answer with a specific number of miles (average distance of about 238,600 miles), which makes the moon seem far, far away. But at a time when astronauts have been to the moon and even brought back lunar rocks for us to see, this same moon doesn't seem so very far away. For many things the question of "how far?" is relative. Today's gospel raises the same question about love, but there is nothing relative about how far we can go in our loving. We must go the distance.

Jesus' huge commitment of love is not impossibly far beyond us, because his own life manifests concretely here and now how to live loving relationships with others. At first glance the gospel this Sunday is about keeping the two great commandments-love of God and neighbor. By answering the lawyer's question with a parable, Jesus shows us a more expansive understanding: that of giving up personal gain for the good of another. Jesus teaches us how far we must go in loving others.

The lawyer puts an important question to Jesus, but it is insincere because he is really posing the question "to test" him. Jesus takes his question at face value and gives a right and all-embracing answer about how we "inherit eternal life." We must make love of God and neighbor the guiding focus of our lives here and now. The Good Samaritan parable admirable and clearly illustrates this kind of love. Our challenge: to go *this far* in our loving. "This far" has no limits, as Jesus himself illustrated by his own life. He loved, even to

dying for us out of that love. Our loving one another must go this far, too. This kind of boundless love redefines who our neighbor is (everyone in need) and sets no limits on our time or care for others. Further, we show our love for God "with all [our] heart[s]" precisely when we love our neighbors "this far."

Ironically, the way we inherit eternal life (to go back to the lawyer's first question) is by dying to self for the sake of another. The Samaritan in the parable isn't moved to help the stricken traveler because of the commandment but because he was a person of loving compassion and mercy-he illustrates unbounded love. This is the law written within our hearts (see first reading)-not details about keeping specific commandments but a positive regard for the other that arises out of genuine love. "This far" must be as wide as our universe and embrace all God's beloved. Only by going "this far" can we truly be neighbor. Only by going "this far" can love truly become the guiding force in our lives. Only by going "this far" can we, like God, be defined as love.

Living the Paschal Mystery

In our society and church today we probably need to become more aware of the value of keeping laws. Our reflection does alert us to the fact that simply keeping laws and commandments isn't enough. All our actions must be directed to the good of others. Keeping laws promotes good order in any community; doing good for others promotes right relationships in those same communities.

Law is something external to us, rather easily measured. Mercy and compassion are internal to us and can be measured only in terms of the good we actually do for others. Laws are internalized-written in our hearts-when they are kept for the sake of others. We are to do as the Samaritan in the parable; let the law of love and compassion guide us and gain for us eternal life.

New and Old Testament links

First Reading — Deuteronomy 30: 10-14

...¹⁰ if only you heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law, when you return to the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul.

¹¹ "For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. ¹² It is not up in the sky, that you

should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' ¹³ Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' ¹⁴ No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36-37

¹⁴ But I pray to you, LORD, for the time of your favor. God, in your great kindness answer me with your constant help. ...

¹⁷ Answer me, LORD, in your generous love; in your great mercy turn to me. ...

³⁰ But I am afflicted and in pain; let your saving help protect me, God, ³¹ That I may praise God's name in song and glorify it with thanksgiving. ...

³³ "See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, take heart! ³⁴ For the LORD hears the poor, does not spurn those in bondage. ...

³⁶ God will rescue Zion, rebuild the cities of Judah. God's servants shall dwell in the land and possess it; ³⁷ it shall be the heritage of their descendants; those who love God's name shall dwell there

Second Reading — Colossians 1: 15-20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him), whether those on earth or those in heaven.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1825. Christ died out of love for us, while we were still "enemies." (*Jn* 8:29) The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our *enemies*, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself. (*Lk* 22:42; cf. *Jn* 4:34; 5:30; 6:38.)

The Apostle Paul has given an incomparable depiction of charity: "charity is patient and kind, charity is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."¹⁰²

2196. In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, '*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,*' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, '*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Sharing and Discussion

1. Where do you see yourself in this encounter?
2. Which area of your life do you find it easiest to wholeheartedly love God? Which is the most difficult?
3. If a person finds himself lacking in compassion toward others, how would you suggest that he develop a compassionate heart?

Closing Prayer

All: God of abundance, you give us all good things in order that your kingdom may be firmly established: hear these prayers that one day we might share in your everlasting kingdom of heaven. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Saturday 10am - 12pm at Church of The Holy Cross (room #03-06)

***** NO SESSION on 10th July *****

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