

Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community  
**30TH ORDINARY SUNDAY**

Cycle A - October 25, 2020



**OPENING PRAYER**

Leader: *I love you, O Lord, my strength,*

All: **O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.**

Leader: *My God, my rock of refuge,  
my shield, the source of my salvation, my stronghold!*

All: **I exclaim "praised be the Lord" and I am safe  
from my enemies.**

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth  
your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.**

**O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have  
instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by  
the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy  
His consolations.**

**First Reading** [ Exodus 22 (20-26) ]

**Thus says the Lord:**

**"You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.**

**"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate."**

**Commentary**

God encountered His people at Mount Sinai and by divine initiative, a Covenant was made which ratified the union of the Lord with Israel. This Covenant included a series of commitments that the Israelite people must meet. By looking at some details of this reading, we can understand the reason for God's preferential option for the vulnerable and those who cannot fend for themselves.

God specifically references aliens, widows, orphans, and those who are economically poor as recipients of special care and attention. When God says "alien", He refers to a stranger, often poor, who lives in an ethnic group that is not his own. Ordinarily, poor people do not have their own property and their only means of life is the sweat of their brow. They are in dire need of legal protection because people often take advantage of them. Widows cannot inherit money or land, and orphans do not own anything. By not having a guaranteed income, these individuals are defenseless and exposed to the injustice.

Resorting to borrowing goods out of necessity to survive is one of the greatest misfortunes that a person in need endures. The poor person has to give their minimal possessions as a guarantee that he or she will repay the debt, which means the very clothing that serves as his or her only protection against the elements. In these cases, the interest rate is theft. What is necessary to survive for the poor person should take precedence over the comfort of the other.

Israel is committing these sins, but God has heard the voice of the oppressed and defends their rights.

Here we find a series of legal provisions to protect the helpless that are in positions of civic, social, or economical inferiority. This concern for the strangers, orphans, widows, and the poor, is constantly seen in the books of the prophets and the law, especially in the Deuteronomy.

The presence of the socially, legally, or economically poor raises awareness while at the same time accuses the reader; while the needy exist in the world, the people of God are under judgment. The people of God are challenged because their law has the same requirement that Jesus left for us, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" (Mt 25. 31-46).

## Reflection

- (1) According to this text, who are the vulnerable and poor that require special protection in today's world?
- (2) Discuss courses of action for Christians to aid those mentioned in the responses to the previous question.
- (3) What do you know about the principles of the Church on Social Justice?
- (4) In the penitential act we pray: "...I have sinned ... in my thoughts, in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do..." In what way do we sin when we know of an unjust situation and do nothing?

## Second Reading [1 Thessalonians 1 (5c-10)]

### **Brothers and sisters:**

***You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.***

## Commentary

This passage is taken from the thanksgiving that prefaces the letter and describes the welcome given to the apostle by the community of Thessalonica who enthusiastically accepted the Good News.

Paul has been surprised by the zeal with which the Thessalonians have imitated him: he has become a model for other believers. He praises their openness to and acceptance of his preaching as well as the way they live according to the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You cannot separate the action of God from the human response in any specific act. However, God is not imposed on those who are not open to him. He calls and we must respond with action or even just good desire. Without the free human response, the process of salvation doesn't work because God does not want puppets, but free, willing adults.

Non-Christians hear the Good News when they witness the way Christians live their lives as a response to the questions being asked about the significance of life here on earth.

## Reflection

- (1) Give examples of three people that the media calls us to imitate or emulate.
- (2) Are these examples consistent with what St. Paul tells us in this reading? How?
- (3) Give examples of three people who are not necessarily in the media's limelight, but that we could imitate in a way that is more consistent with this reading.

## Gospel [Matthew 22 (34-40)]

***When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.***

***The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.***

***The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."***



## Commentary

The question is presented to Jesus with bad intentions but was truthfully a debated issue in the rabbinical schools. The teachers of the law distinguish between 365 precepts and 248 prohibitions, (613 commandments in total!). Therefore, there was an urgent need to reduce that entire legal luggage to a primary, understandable commandment of the law. However, this was not an easy task. Responding to the same question, the rabbi Hillel (around the year 20 BC) pronounced this famous statement: "Do not do unto another what you would not want for you: this is the whole law. The rest is simply its explanation".

The originality of Jesus' answer is not the emphasis on the love for God as the primary commandment because all the Jews recognized the importance of this precept, which was recited twice a day. The novelty is that Jesus places the love of one's neighbor on the same level. Jesus suggests that both precepts are inseparable and are the same focal point of the whole Law. To separate the commandment to love God from the love of one's neighbor would be as absurd as trying to divide in Christ the human and the divine. In either case, there is a distinction, but never a separation.

## Reflection

- (1) What does it mean to love one's neighbor? Give specific examples of how to love one's neighbor.
- (2) Read 1 John 3 (19-21). Compare the message to this reading.
- (3) Distinguish between "like" and "love". Is it possible that one can love a person we do not like? Why? How?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees may propose their own petitions to God)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we met, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father and of the Son .....**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

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## The Church and Social Justice

Pope John Paul II made the following definition of social sin: "*social sin is every sin committed against the rights of the human person, starting with the right to life, or against the physical integrity of any person ... The Church ... knows and proclaims that these cases of social sins are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins.*"

In March 2008 the Holy See published a list of "social sins", to draw attention to those behaviors and attitudes that we have already accepted as "normal", without doing much to make a change. There are not really new sins; what has been done is simply a lifting up of the curtain that was blocking a cruel and disgusting reality.

The list of "social sins" is the following:

1. The bioethical violations, used mainly as means for contraception.
2. The morally dubious experiments, such as stem cell research.
3. The drug addiction.
4. Polluting the environment.
5. Contributing to widening the gap between the rich and the poor.
6. The excessive wealth.
7. Generating poverty.