

30A 2020 SML
MT 22:34-40

In preparing this homily, I took a mini-quick tour on the internet regarding biblical law. It was amazing how ignorant the general public is regarding the scriptures. Many an internet contributor, of course, went to the Old Testament and cited more than a few Old Testament verses in order to discredit the entire Bible, throwing out the baby with the bath water, if you will. And in this case the Baby is the Christ Child. Some laws cited were:

- Any person who curses his father or mother must be killed ~Leviticus 20:9
- People who have flat noses, or are blind or lame, cannot go to an altar of God ~Leviticus 21:17-18
- Anyone who dreams or prophecies anything that is against God, or anyone who tries to turn you from God, is to be put to death ~Deuteronomy 13:5
- The eating of fat is prohibited forever ~Leviticus 3:17
- Stubborn children were to be stoned, and the stoning was to be instigated by their parents ~Deuteronomy 21:18-21
- False prophets are to be killed by their own parents ~Zechariah 13:3

There are more, but you get my point.

Around the year 165 AD, the philosopher and theologian St. Justin was martyred in Rome because of his Christian faith. He was a renowned theologian, who is famous for his written work Apology, or his explanation of personal law, and for his written work Dialogue with the Jew Trypho. In his Dialogue, St. Justin wrote:

The law promulgated on Mount Horeb is now old, and belongs to the Jews alone . . . now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law – namely, Christ – has been given to us.

In summary, St. Justin says the TORAH has lost its legal authority. In juridical terms, it is abrogated. Nothing in it remains valid except what corresponds to the law of reason, for example, its moral demands. Also valid are its constant, often mysteriously hidden references to Christ. But as law, the TORAH has no further significance because “a new lawgiver,” namely Christ, has come. He has given a new, an eternal law. But He is not only a lawgiver. He Himself in His person, is this new and eternal law.

Keep in mind, this is the Christian understanding of the scriptures since the second century, but during Jesus' time, such conclusions had not yet been made.

In today's gospel, a scribe asked Jesus which commandment in the TORAH was the "greatest." What the scribe asks is not altogether new; it was something that was commonly being asked in different ways in Jesus' time. It was the search for the center of the TORAH – or the effort to summarize the TORAH in brief, as the TORAH is comprised of 613 different laws. It was in no way about a disqualification or nonobservance of all the commandments, but primarily a way to teach and understand the whole TORAH.

Jesus answers the scribe's question by taking two commandments:

1. loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind as found in Deuteronomy 6, and
 2. love your neighbor as yourself in Leviticus 19,
- two commandments that in the first place have nothing to do with each other, and are widely separated in the TORAH, and bringing them together and tying them one to the other.

What is new with Jesus is linking love of God and love of neighbor.

What's new is Jesus extending love of neighbor to one's enemies:

- ✓ If anyone strikes you on the cheek
- ✓ If anyone takes away your tunic
- ✓ If anyone forces you to go one mile.

What's new is God is gracious to the ungrateful and the wicked.

What's new is Jesus uses imagery that is scarcely bearable to those who try to take advantage of the law:

- ✓ You notice the splinter in your brother's eye but miss the plank in your own eye. (MT 7:3)
- ✓ If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. (MT 5:29)
- ✓ You strain out the gnat but swallow the camel. (MT 23:24)

Today's gospel speaks of two dimensions of the cross: the vertical dimension and the horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension of Christian spirituality, symbolized by the vertical beam of the cross, represents the relationship we have with God "above," to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. It's the above part is why we call it "vertical," even though God is in others and inside ourselves as well. People with a high vertical spirituality carry a tall cross, and invest

most of their spiritual effort on improving or maintaining their relationship with God by:

- ✓ praying regularly,
- ✓ spending time in Adoration,
- ✓ going to confession,
- ✓ going to Mass,
- ✓ studying more about God,
- ✓ and/or participating in religious events, devotions and traditions.

The horizontal dimension of Christian spirituality, symbolized by the horizontal beam of the cross, represents the way your faith motivates you to treat other people. Love your neighbor as yourself. People with a high horizontal spirituality carry a wide cross, and are always:

- ✓ recognizing others in need,
- ✓ helping out,
- ✓ performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy
- ✓ treating people with respect and kindness, and
- ✓ sticking up for the underdog.

They actively form a strong moral conscience about what's right and what's wrong, what's noble and what's true.

Take a self-assessment of the cross you carry, regarding vertical and horizontal dimensions. If your cross is short, what could you do to make it taller? If your cross is narrow, what could you do to make it wider? The goal is to grow your cross into one that's tall and wide, a cross that shows you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and that you love your neighbor as yourself.