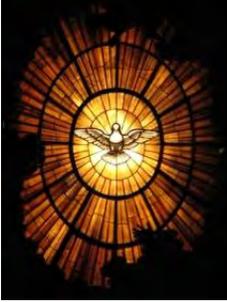


BIBLICAL OR LEGAL JUSTICE?



My father is very good with directions such as this one: head north until you reach Farm Point Drive and then head east until you crest the second hill and then head north. That's a skill I cannot comprehend. Just tell me that when I leave the driveway turn left until I reach the doughnut shop and then turn right. At least get me started.

In Exodus we hear a small part of the directions towards fulfilling God's law: you shall not molest or oppress an alien; you shall not wrong any widow or orphan; you shall not act as an extortioner. It is like listening to a GPS guiding us to our salvation: go straight for point six miles and turn left. It *may* get us to our destination (GPS is not infallible) but it leaves us with no chance to participate in the journey, no chance to change the road we take towards our destination, no chance to visit the local fare, little chance to get lost or make a mistake.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus gives us a map and then lets us make our own way to our destination, the Kingdom of Heaven, with only two parameters: love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself. This gives us plenty of room for individualism, free will and creativity; we are free of the constrictions of a severely prescribed method of behaving that fails to allow us to be *fully* human.

Jesus' two greatest commandments echo advice I received decades ago: "you can do what is legal or you can do what is right." Legal justice is, obviously, doing as the law instructs us. Biblical justice is legal justice and mercy, compassion, morality and ethics.

Legal justice is the GPS-prescribed method of acting. Biblical justice is the map that we use to find our way while encouraging participation in the journey.

For example, legal justice may tell us not to oppress an alien. By adhering to the standards of biblical justice, however, we may decide to do more than not oppress an alien, we may decide to provide succor to the alien, we may decide to not only *not* oppress an alien but to challenge unjust situations that oppress an entire class of aliens. Christians are not told exactly what to do, only to carry mercy, compassion, morality—loving God fully and without hesitation and loving our neighbor—in our backpacks as we travel on the road towards the Kingdom of Heaven.

(Readings for 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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