

Homily for 31st Sunday b cycle, October 31, 2021

In his reflections on today's gospel, priest and author, Father George Rutler writes:

"If Jesus held a press conference today, it is unlikely that any reporter would rush up to ask which commandment is the most important.

More likely, he would be asked why there are commandments at all and if it might be possible to drop a few".

After all, most journalists have adopted the view that truth is relative. A scribe employed by the corporate media can boast, "I am the law, I am the truth" He alone determines what is true or false, right or wrong. He or she takes offense at those who teach what they have rejected.

In our gospel, we are introduced to a prominent member of the Jewish community, the scribe. In the religious world of Jesus, the scribe was a religious scholar and teacher of the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament). Pious Jews often turned to the Rabbi for counsel on how to apply the over six hundred commandments in the Torah to their daily life.

As a sincere searcher of the truth, we learn the scribe had a sincere admiration for Jesus and his teaching.

Jesus teaches us the dual commandment of love. The first and second commandment---- love of God and love of neighbor—are inseparable. You can't have one without the other. It can be compared to a coin. A coin has two sides, but it is really one coin.

In his first epistle, the Evangelist, John, echoes the words of Christ:

"If anyone says, "I love God" but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from Him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

To clarify: If there is only one God, he is the God of all people. If there is only one God than every human being created by God is our neighbor.

As one biblical scholar puts it, "We do not worship a God who is God only of our tribe or country, we worship the God who is Lord of all and who asks for our love to be as broad as his".

But how difficult it is to live up to such a hard teaching! Too many people we encounter in life seem to be unlovable.

When I was a first-year college student, I was required to read a book written by Sigmund Freud, a pioneer in the field of psychoanalysis. The book's title is noteworthy: "Civilization and its discontents". Freud was so conscious of the differences between people that he came to the conclusion that not all human beings are worthy of love. Indeed, one does a grave injustice by loving the unlovable. It is one of the reasons Freud rejected Christianity.

Consider the example set by Jesus. In the well known Parable of the Good Samaritan, the unlikely hero, the Samaritan comes to the aid of a Jew, who had been assaulted and left to die. He was a neighbor to the victim. While on the cross, Jesus, in a magnanimous gesture, forgave those responsible for his execution. Jesus was true to his word. He truly loved his neighbor!

Bear in mind we do have the power from God to fulfill this commandment. We are not commanded to like other people, but to seek what is good for them, their salvation.

If we are true to Our Lord's dual commandment of love, than those words spoken by him to the scribe will apply to each one of us: "You are not far from the kingdom of God."