

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

***Reflections on the Two Commandments of LOVE***

The phrase regarding 'two Commandments of Love' might sound strange and like a surprise package, but that is my theme for you. Think about it. **The Scriptures for our reflections this weekend (Ex. 22:20-26; 1 Thess. 1:5c-10; Mt. 22:34-40; Ps. 18) are about the marriage between our cultures and Christian practice; how we must enculturate Christianity.** We are the people to Christianize our cultures, customs and traditions. It is not a theoretical issue but requires a practical approach. In a culture where there is no Gospel enculturation, the practice of the Christian Faith will only be shallow. The result would be that any slightest upheaval or challenge would just erode our religiosity. Hence, "Since this people draws near with words only and honors me with lips alone, ..." (Is. 29:13-16). We are familiar with the phrase 'lip service'. That is not what God wants of us. All of us did not study Inculturation. That is why those of us who studied it ought to see that the Faith is deep-rooted in our cultures. This role belongs to those of us called to the Teaching Ministry of Christ, beginning with the Bishops, the Clergy, the Religious, etc. The proclamation of the Kingdom and true faith practice ought to be of utmost concern to this class of people among the Christian people.

Last week I did touch the aspect that **Mission Sunday Command** demands that **Christianity must permeate and evangelize all cultures.** As Christians from our cultures and peoples, we do not need outsiders, *per se*, to research and investigate our cultures and determine what is un-Christian. We must honestly do justice to our cultures and service to the Lord. **In some cultures, foreign missionaries have been accused of misunderstanding the customs and traditions of the peoples, of interpreting as pagan and idolatry what held the fabrics of their society together as a people.** Now that we are the Christians, and most cultures are no longer depending on foreign missionaries, what strides are we making with our studies of inculturation, to evangelize and Christianize our cultures in the light of the Gospel?

**In the First Reading from Ex. 22:20-26, we are challenged to make a difference in the various ways people maltreat and disrespect, dehumanize, dishonor the image of God in each other, ourselves.** Sometimes we do so as nationalists regarding immigration, sometimes as seniors or elders, and in the family under the cover of tradition. Widows and orphans are wronged, oppressed and denied what they should inherit to survive. In some traditions, widows are subjected to untold inhuman and pagan rites in the name of tradition, perpetuated by the very Christian personnel we elect or appoint to officiate in Church Councils, Organizations and ministries. **Christian leaders must be careful lest they practice syncretism, the act of being seen in the camp of two distinct religions, in this case, Christianity and Traditional Religion.** In matters like these, that is where the Church leaders, priests, bishops and, in fact, the cultural sub-regions of the Bishops Conferences ought to stand out and take a stand in decisive teaching. When prominent Christians become perpetrators or axes of evil, they confuse the ordinary Christians, and dishonor the Church. The evil effect is loss of faith in our Christian denomination and decamping from the Church. Pastor and Priests must be genuinely concerned in how the faith is lived out among their parishioners, and channel their preaching to such areas to refute errors and give directive (cf. **2 Tm 3:16-17**). **The whole Bible passages today are pointing out to us what must happen after we have received baptism and the other Sacraments.**

The commandment to love has two folds: love of God and love of our neighbor. It is a known fact that there are ten commandments given to Moses by God. **But when you study or teach these Commandments as I did in those days in catechism, you discover that the first three are Love of God, and the other seven are Love of Neighbor, (cf. Ex. 20:1-17).** Therefore, in my Bible study classes as in today's Gospel, (cf. Mt. 22:34-40), the Lord confirms it for us when he summarizes the Commandments as Two – Love of God and Love of Neighbor. In conclusion, he said: "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments, (Mt. 22:40). It is in this manner that one can interpret the Ten Commandments as being Two Commandments or two laws of love. In fact, the Ten Commandments are centered on LOVE.

The Gospel today confronts us with real godly command. To love our neighbor as ourselves, (Mt. 22:34-40), is a clear departure from un-Christian mentality of the law of tit for tat: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth", (Ex. 21:23-25; Mt. 5:38-48). **The Christian is called to make a difference from the way and manner people of the world treat each other, from the way worldly people handle matters, or settle disputes, or relate to others whether they share the same race, language, tribe, nation or not.** In Christianity, we share the same citizenship in Christ Jesus. This citizenship is eternal, above all things and supersedes anything that divide and separate peoples here on earth. In Christ, we are sisters and brothers, no Jews nor Gentiles, but only God's own people called in his name into one baptism in Christ.

**In Conclusion:** St. Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians in our Second Reading today, is all time standard. It was good and meaningful then, today and will be tomorrow until Christ comes. We are the Church, the Church of today. We must take our religion seriously, by digging deeply to uproot all the cankerworms that militate against our religion in the cultures and practices of our Christian people. We have rested on our oars as if the battle is over. Yes, the battle is won for us by Christ but not over among us. As in our acclamation last week, we are the ones to "shine like lights in the world, as you hold on to the word of life." (Phil. 2:15-16). Thessalonica was the first place Paul wrote his Epistle to we are told. Therefore, he challenged them graciously in our Second Reading today. We may be the first generation of Christians in our various cultures, or the second, third, fourth or tenth. Whatever our position might be, Islam, Atheism, Communism, Hinduism and other religions are nowadays great threats to Christianity in society, in politics, and in schools of learning where our young people are reared. In the Gospel today, the Pharisees challenged the Lord. **Nowadays, it is no longer the challenge of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There are over ten religions in the world, and all regard Christianity as the common enemy. Where are the Christians today?** If we are committed Christians, our political views ought not disrupt or affect our love for each other. We must not treat politics as our religion, or our candidate as our religious teacher or prophet. That is why there is separation of State and Religion. Nevertheless, Christians must be aware that in some countries, religion and politics are inter-twined among the Muslims. Hence, their religious leaders control political leaders and social life, education, and several other areas of life. Not to know these by us amounts to naivety.