

31st Ordinary Sunday
October 31, 2021
“Fear or Love?”

Dt 6:2-6
Heb 7:23-28
Mk 12:28-34

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

No one really likes laws. Even the best of laws will seem to be overly strict and will curtail the freedom of at least some people.

But laws are needed to ensure the public order. Sad to say, many people selfishly serve themselves. They will take advantage of others if it were not against the law.

Consequently, fear – and fear of consequences – is one of the main deterrents that keeps people law-abiding. They fear the substantial fine and even the jail or prison time that the laws impose. Yet, as events over the past year have made clear, some people will break laws with impunity if in the ensuing chaos, they can escape apprehension and arrest. Furthermore, releasing lawbreakers without any punishment is madness, if we want an ordered society.

What so many never seem to understand is that laws exist to further the common good of everyone. Every human being is a child of God and must be treated with dignity and respect. Furthermore, God loves everyone without exception. And God expects us to show forth and prove our love for Him in the way we behave toward everyone else. Fortunately, the scriptures for today have much to teach us in this regard.

When the Chosen People were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded them how they must live and behave toward God and toward one another. Moses told them to let fear be their motivation if nothing else – Because if they kept all the statutes and commandments of the Lord God – they would “live long and prosper” in the land they were about to occupy and possess.

Then Moses exclaims: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!” In other words, none of the pagan gods or entities could ever be subjects of worship for the Israelites. And the way for them to achieve this was to move from fear to love. They were to abandon their fear and worship of the pagan no-gods – Instead, they were to move even from their fear of the Lord God to loving Him with all their being. They were to love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, and strength!

We know from history that the Chosen People failed at this – They did not always remain faithful. Thus, more than once, Israel and Judah paid the price with severe consequences. They were defeated in war – occupied by their enemies – and deported to Assyria and Babylon in exile.

However, there was always a remnant of faithful ones who loved the Lord God – even in the worst of times. And it was from these faithful, loving ones, that Jesus came!

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was asked which of all the commandments of the Mosaic Law was the most important. This included all of the 613 prescriptions of that law. Although Jesus quotes the Book of Deuteronomy, he gives the impetration a more profound nuance: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!” In other words, there is no other God of the universe or Lord of the cosmos. All other beings and entities are His creation and His work. Therefore, we must love this wonderful and marvelous Lord and God with our total being which includes our “mind” as well as our heart, soul, and strength!

But there is more. If we truly love God this way, then we must also love all that the Lord God loves – which includes our neighbor. And our neighbor is everyone, without exception – even our enemies. We must treat them the way that we would have ourselves be treated. This means that we must, at least, pray for them and wish them well.

Brothers and Sisters, this is, truly, a daunting task – given the world, the society, and the culture in which we live today! Nevertheless, it is made less so, if we remember God’s love for us. God created us and gave us a share of His own divine life – He has destined us for eternal life with Him. Yet, when we sinned, failed, and turned away to our idols – God never abandoned us. He sent His grace – His love and inspiration – to enable our return. Ultimately, He even sent His Son, in the humanity of Jesus – who lived and loved as an example for us. This Son, in his human form, died on a cross and was raised. Now, and forevermore, he stands before the throne of God. There, as our eternal high priest, he makes intercession for us – offering the love of his sacrifice to God on our behalf – as today’s passage from Hebrews reveals.

So, let us be grateful. Let us pray that we learn to love without fear.

And may we learn to love with something of the love the Lord, our God, has for us!

Amen.

October 31, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra