



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

October 26, 2014

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel reading Matthew 22:34-40 [To be read aloud]

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Brief commentary:

Today's readings follow directly from last Sunday's: again Jesus is put to the test by opponents wishing to trip him through clever but duplicitous debates, and each time Jesus prevails as the better debater with the better argument. The question at hand concerns the Law: "Rabbi, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" At the heart of the Jewish relationship with God is the revealed Torah. More than law, it is a way of life that guides relationships: Jewish relationship with God, with other Jews and peoples, and with the land. Today's reading from Exodus attests to the high level of ethics, morality, justice and compassion that the Law, the Torah, calls for. As a Jew, Jesus inherited this grand ethos, which was the result of centuries of composition and reflection. Yet the Law was rather broad and encompassing just about every aspect of life, guiding everything from agriculture to marriage, from ritual to economy. By Jesus' time there was a concern about a core principle that would offer the Law a guiding theme and interpretative vision. The question was famously posed to the great Rabbi Hillel, who died in about 10 BC. He was challenged to articulate the whole law while standing on one foot. The wise rabbi did so, using one sentence: "What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor; the rest is commentary; go and learn it." When the question was posed to Jesus, no doubt he would have remembered texts like today's Exodus reading that calls for justice and compassion toward both Israelite and foreigner. Yet, he chose his response from two other great Jewish texts: "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, recited twice daily by Jews. And from Leviticus 19:9-18, he added its companion commandment: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." For Jesus, these two commandments are really two sides of the same coin. The Ten Commandments themselves unite commandments dealing with our relationship toward God and toward neighbor. But Deuteronomy and Leviticus take it further: justice is the basis but not the highest principle of our relationships...it is love. For Jesus, this is the core principle; this is the vision and theme that is behind all divine revelation. The letter of 1 John (4:21) would describe it thus: "And this commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God, must also love his brother." Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and the Judgment of the Nations both assert this principle: "whatever you did for the least of my brothers you did for me." Therefore, both Judaism and Christianity are about *practice*, and not just theory or creed. And this concrete practical daily practice is love: "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is the true creative, affirming, healing, liberating, empowering, transforming, power of our lives and of our world. Love created the universe, love raises the dead, and love feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, cares for and defends the vulnerable, and gives itself daringly without self-interest. And as Paul would assert: "Love never fails!" (1 Corinthians 13). No greater theme is more attested to in the Scriptures and in the Christian tradition. The wholehearted love of God and neighbor is truly the greatest commandment of the God who is infinite love.

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- The Law, the Torah, is the sacred anthology that guides relationships for the Jewish people. During Jesus' time the quest for a binding vision and foundation for all the Torah led the scholar's interest in today's gospel.
- For Jesus, the wholehearted love of God and of neighbor – as expressed in the Torah – form the heart of the Law and thus ought to guide our lives, our decisions, our actions, how we treat others, our values and attitudes, the sort of persons we become, the way we live.
- For Jesus God and people come first. Whoever truly loves God proves it in the daily practical ways of loving one's neighbor, including the foreigner and enemy.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- Do I study and reflect on the Scriptures so that these inform, shape, guide and inspire me in how I relate to God, neighbor and world?
- Is love the core guiding and operative principle of my life as a Christian?
- How do I love God and how do I love my neighbor?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2052-74, 2196