

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A OCT 29, 2017

First Reading: Exodus 22:20-26 (Do not wrong the widow or the orphan; I will hear the cry of the poor)

Responsorial Psalm 18 "I love you, Lord, my strength" or Ps. 34 "The Lord hears the cry of the poor."

Second Reading: Thessalonians 1:5c-10 (You became imitators of us & of the Lord.)

Alleluia Verse: "If you love me, you will keep my word and the Father will love you & we will come to you."

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40 (You shall love the Lord, your God, & your neighbor as yourself)

♪ *Love, love, love, love, Christians this is your call.*
Love your neighbor as yourself for God loves us all. ♪

What Old Testament Scripture is Jesus quoting in today's Gospel?

There are 2 verses from 2 different books. The 1st is from Deuteronomy 6:5. In Hebrew it begins: "*Shema Israel, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echod*" the prayer is called the "*Shema*." It's the prayer every Good Jew says every day even now. It is for a good Jew the equivalent of the Our Father for a Christian. The Hebrew words mean "*Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is one.*" The next line is: "*You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.*"

The 2nd quote is from Leviticus 19:18 The whole verse is: "*You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart...take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow Israelite. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.*" Both are part of the 1st 5 books of the Bible, the section known as the Torah.

The words are ancient commands to the Jewish people, but Jesus is giving them new meaning by joining them together.

The rest of his teaching gives them a *revolutionary* new meaning because Jesus makes it clear that my neighbor is not just a member of my own tribe or nation or race. For us that means that my neighbor is not just my fellow American, my progressive or my traditional friends or even my fellow Catholic or Christian. My neighbor is anyone who is a member of the human family.

My friend the otter carries this message of Jesus on his tee shirt.



"I LOVE MY HUMAN!"

Pope John XXIII, now declared a Saint, said the same thing in 1963, in his great encyclical "Pacem in Terris" [Peace on Earth] when he called all people of good will to become "more and more conscious of being living members of the universal family of humankind." (#145)

But this basic Gospel truth is so new, so revolutionary, so challenging that we still don't really get it. We have not really heard the story of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus makes it so clear that we are all each other's neighbor. If we did, we would treat each other as family, even when we disagree. We would accept immigrants as brothers & sisters in need of welcome, men, women and children who are like most of our own grandparents and great-grandparents. We would work harder to solve conflicts by diplomacy before we took up arms, we would be more attentive to how our economy & taxes affect people on fixed incomes or limited resources. We would be more careful to look at the consequences for the land, for our children & for the poor before accepting the promise of easy money and immediate jobs from industries that pollute & damage the environment.

When that truth begins to sink in, and more and more people begin to act on it, our world will begin to look more like the one God created & our Church will look more like the one Christ founded. The Gospel still reminds the establishment what it was established for.

The first reading makes it clear that our neighbor is the widow, the orphan, the alien - a description of those who were most vulnerable at that time. It describes an economy based on care for the poorest and on the common good rather than greed and exploitation.

But nations today spend trillions on weapons that can destroy the world 50 times over, and almost nothing to support small farmers. Our own government still can't figure out how to provide health care for the vulnerable among us, or how to guarantee access to treatment for addicts or the mentally ill - or even veterans.

But before I can truly recognize and care about the neighbor I am called to love, I need to hear the rest of the commandment: "Love your neighbor **as yourself.**"

The Jewish interpretation of this verse is NOT "love your neighbor as you love yourself", The Jewish understand the command to love your neighbor **AS** yourself - loving your neighbor as if they were you! That is to say, love your neighbor with awareness that we are so closely connected that what blesses him blesses me, and what harms her, harms me.

As a contemporary writer [Eckardt Tolle] puts it, "Love is the recognition of yourself in the other." I was challenged to love in that way when I was walking with someone who was in prison & became very frustrated at the roadblocks to his release. I wanted desperately to fix his problem, but I could not. The best I could do was to share his pain and frustration. In that I was loving him as if I were in his situation. And I really felt his pain. It was like walking a mile in his shoes.

The teaching of the Rabbi Jesus does, of course, include the call to love myself. Sometimes the person I find most difficult to love and accept is **ME**. But this way of understanding that command is a more effective way of loving myself - since it does not leave me isolated but connects me with my neighbor and with the God who loves us more than we could love ourselves.

The words on my otter's tee-shirt could be put on the lips of Jesus, *I love my human*. This phrase means that my neighbor even includes my enemy. And the love of Jesus even includes creatures like him who are not human. My otter reminds me of our connections to the earth & our responsibility to care for all God's creatures.

In the world and in our own country, I can feel hopeless. I often feel so small, so powerless to really make a difference in the lives of the hungry and the homeless or in the state of our national leadership or to fix the problems in the Church. I can feel like giving up. But then I read the sentence about loving my neighbor another way. I am called to love my neighbor as **myself**, that is, as the person I am, such as I am, not as the one I wish I were or will never be.

When we grow in love for our neighbor, ourselves and the rest of creation, we experience an even deeper need for God's light and strength and love. I can't sustain my love for others, or for myself, or for the earth without the nourishment of the Body of Christ, both the sacrament of the Eucharist and people like you who share their faith and their struggle to love with me.

I read your college newspaper, *The State Times*, on Saturday. It includes 3 articles reflecting your concern for women who are abused or assaulted, your recognition of the connection between racial justice and sports & your attempt to reach out beyond your own experience of life as you search for your own identities. I see these as attempts to walk in someone else's shoes, to love your neighbor as yourselves. We pray that your lives will keep telling the Gospel story of how caring for each other & the earth can empower us to not only survive but to thrive as we love God and one another.

We come together today to express and deepen our love for God, for others and for ourselves. Those expressions of love are not a list or the order we have to do it in, they form a **tripod**. They don't compete, they balance, & if all three are not there, the tripod is unsteady, my love limps.

Our call today is to get to know the God who is love, to put God at the center of our lives & to serve the God who loves us by loving one another as the family we are in God's eyes. Both the invitation to love & the power to respond are in our Baptism & in this celebration of the Eucharist.

There is another song which draws on the words of the prophet Micah to show us how to love God and each other in deed and truth, and not just in words:

♪ Come, open your heart! Show your mercy to all those in fear!

We are called to be hope for the hopeless, so all hatred and blindness will be no more!

We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly,

We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God. ♪

