

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
OCTOBER 23, 2023
THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

Exodus 22:20-26	God will defend those who have no one.
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10	Serve God and await his Son.
Matthew 22:34-40	Love your God and love your neighbor.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

Again, the enemies of Jesus (and the opponents of the Christian Jews in Matthew's community) come at him with another *entrapment* or *snare*, which is meant to lead to his death. If he fails this test on the tradition of their ancestors, he will be deserving of death. He will be charged with blaspheming God.

We need to remember that Matthew writes for a community of Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. They are under attack from the larger Jewish community which does not accept Jesus. What Matthew says of the struggle between Jesus and the Pharisees and the Sadducees applies to the struggle between these Christian Jews of his community and those other Jews who oppose them.

Jesus has just *silenced the Sadducees*: He would not fall into their trap about the woman who had married many brothers. *Whose wife would she be in the next life?* He defines what the life of resurrection is all about. He is now confronted with another of the traditional disputes in the emerging world of the rabbis. *Which is the greatest of all the commandments?* Whose side is he on in the age-old debate about the classification and the weight of each of the laws in the Books of Moses?

By the time Matthew wrote his Gospel, there were at least two arguments about the commandments of God among Jewish teachers: How many commandments were there, anyway, in the tradition? And among all these, which was the most important? Which could be used to summarize all the others?

The oral tradition had pretty much agreed that there were 613 commands in the Law of Moses. Now, the problem was how are these to be arranged, organized, classified, and weighed as to importance and consequence? The "battle of the schools" raged for generations! The followers of Rabbi Akiba said it was, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Hillel had taught, "What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law; the rest is commentary. Go and learn." Some said Psalm 15 had reduced everything to 11 commands. Isaiah (Isaiah 33:15) reduced them to six. Micah (Micah 6:8) found only three. Second Isaiah (Isaiah 56:1) had two. Finally, Habakkuk (2:4) had it all in one! "The righteous shall live by faith!" See what Jesus (and Matthew's community) had to contend with?

Exodus:

There is a section in Exodus that has been called the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22 - 23:33). It contains the laws that regulate the relationships of people who are under God's rule or under the Covenant. We remember that the Covenant was willingly and enthusiastically entered into by the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai out of gratitude to God for being delivered from oppression in Egypt. The powerless in society were not to be oppressed; God himself would vindicate their rights. Aliens, widows, and orphans, as well as the poor, had no one to protect them. The prohibition against charging interest for a loan was meant to protect the poor, the only ones who needed to borrow in Israelite society. If a cloak had been taken as a pledge of payment for the loan, it had to be returned every evening since the poor had no other covering for protection from the cold of the night.

Thessalonians:

The Church at Thessalonica has become a model of *faith, hope, and love* to the other Christian communities in the area. Later, the Church will name these virtues the *Theological Virtues*, since they relate the person directly to God, the *Theos*. The enthusiasm of the Christians is literally true: the word means *filled with God*! In the midst of their *afflictions*, they are still full of joy. *Afflictions*, here, has overtones of that suffering that will be part of the final battle between good and evil at the end of time. Paul indicates that their suffering has a meaning beyond the present moment. It is part of the ultimate struggle between good and evil that marks the end of times.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Of all the laws of the Church (1,752 in the *Revised Code of Canon Law*, 1983), which do you consider the most important? Seriously now, which do you feel can never be left out of your confession of sins? Which makes you feel the most guilty? [By the way, it is not against Church law to commit adultery. It is against God's law! But it is against Church law to eat meat on Fridays during Lent.] What about God's law and Church law? How do you weigh one against the other?
2. Do you know what *law of conscience* means? Are you aware that if you believe something to be wrong, although it may not be in fact, you are held to that by God? What will God do on the day of judgment with all the people who ate meat on Fridays before the Church law was changed? How do you deal with conscience in the moral formation of children? At what age do you think children know the difference between right and wrong?
3. Who is your favorite saint? Share your experiences with one another concerning the intercessory role of the saints in your life. Do you sometimes ask your deceased relatives to intercede for you before God in heaven? Do you ask other Christians in this world to pray for you also? Should you?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Take a look at who the *widows, orphans, and the poor* are in the society in which we live. Now that the government has said it is up to charitable organizations to care for these, decide what you will do, as an individual, as a group, as a parish.

PRAYER

**Happy are those who have died in the Lord;
let them rest from their labors for their good deeds go with them.**
(Gospel Acclamation for the Feast of All Souls)

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Bishop Joseph J. Gerry, O.S.B., the tenth bishop of Portland, borrowed from the Eastern Rite liturgies when he held up the bread and cup just before holy Communion: “God's holy gifts, for God's holy people!” The *holy gifts*, of course, refer to the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. The *holy people* refer to the assembly of faith, the people gathered to celebrate the holy mysteries. We are indeed a *holy people* before the face of God!

The *communion of saints* proclaims one of the most ancient beliefs of the Christian people. From the *Apostles' Creed*, we claim that we believe in the communion of saints. This does not mean that the saints are lined up to receive Communion from the Lord in heaven! *Communion* here means *fellowship* or *sharing* in the gifts given by God to those whom God has chosen. Those who belong to God under Christ are gathered into the body of Christ in such a way that they share in the holiness that emanates from Christ, the head of the body. All who belong to Christ are *saints*; all these have been transformed from sin to grace by the power of the Holy Spirit. *Santa sanctis!*

All Saints' Day reminds us of this doctrine which is so dear to all of us. We have fellowship with those who have gone before us and with those who are still in this world *in the body of Christ* that is the Church. We share in the same *faith*. We gather together, even in the presence of those who are already in heaven, whenever we celebrate the sacraments. Even if only one penitent is present with one priest in the sacrament of reconciliation, the whole Church, in heaven and on earth, is present there to celebrate the mercy of the Lord. We share in the fellowship of *hope* for the life of heaven with God. We share in the fellowship of *charity* as we exchange with one another all that we have been given by God.

The saints are very important to the life of the Church and to the Catholic people. We have fellowship with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother. She holds priority of place among all the saints. She was the first to believe in the Son of God, the first to hope for salvation through Jesus Christ, the first to love him and to love his disciples because of him. Saint Joseph is the protector of the Church, as he was protector of the Son of God and of Jesus' mother. Our own patron saints, those whose names we bear and those we have chosen to be our special intercessors before the throne of God, are our friends and a sign of what we hope to be by God's mercy and love.