

## **UNUS MAGISTER**

*A Homily for the Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year (B)*

*St Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.*

*Texts: Deut. 4: 1-2, 6-8; Ps. 15; James 1:17-18, 21-22,27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15,21-23.*

**“The One Teacher”**, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the lawgiver, the interpreter of the law and the One who fulfils the law.

The First Reading presents us with the farewell instructions of Moses. He tells the people that they must keep the laws of God which they received through him. It is by so doing that their neighbours and other people will respect and fear them. He reminds them about their unique dignity as the chosen people of God. There is no other nation or people who can compare with the chosen people because the Lord God is with them.

After hearing the instructions of Moses, one might mistakenly think that the Pharisees and the scribes were right to be scandalised that the disciples of Jesus were not observing the tradition of washing of hands before eating. Here is the truth: the Pharisees and the scribes failed to emphasise and teach the most important laws, which are to love the Lord God above all things and to love ones neighbour as one loves oneself, but preferred to insist on mere human traditions. The Lord in rebuking them for their hypocrisy teaches us the lesson that we all need to know. We should give priority to what God counts as important and not exalt human traditions above the laws of God.

Many Christians in the world know the Ten Commandments by heart. Many know that Jesus affirmed the teaching in the Old Testament (Matt. 22: 37; Deut. 6:5): **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”** and **“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”** (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18). But what Jesus is teaching us today is how we can live a life of faithful love for the Lord God and active and selfless love for other human beings.

The first step is to recognise our need for help. We read about the inability of the people of Israel of old to keep the laws of God. The pages of the books of the Old Testament are full of the accounts of the repeated infidelity to the law of God. And if we are honest to ourselves, we see ourselves as in a mirror when we read about them. They failed to live according to law of God because they forgot that they needed the help of God who was always near them. And the reason we fail is that we forget that we need the help of God who is very near us. We forget that God became man precisely because we are not able to save ourselves. The Pharisees and the scribes did not recognise Jesus as author of life and the lawgiver. If they did, they would not have challenged him as they did. They would have learnt from him and let him into their hearts so that he would transform their lives from within.

Jesus is not only the lawgiver; he is the interpreter of the law. And he is the one in whom all the laws and teachings of the prophets are fulfilled. He is the Love of the Father who came down to us so that we who are incapable of keeping the law may be saved by his grace. In him the demands of the law are fulfilled and law becomes love – love becomes the only law. Through our baptism we have been incorporated into Christ. He has given us his Spirit. And if his Spirit is at work in us, we will live as he has taught us. A life without Christ is characterised by hypocrisy and is full of sins. But a life in Christ is characterised by charity. It is a life lived in truth. A life lived in honest service of others.

What the Lord is teaching us as we listen is the same lesson he taught his Apostles and disciples. St James the Apostle teaches us the same lesson we hear from Christ: ***“Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God the Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world.”*** The grace of Christ bears the fruit of

good works in us. What St James says is the same as what St Paul the Apostle teaches when he tells us, ***“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, (namely) “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:8-10).***

When the Spirit of Christ is alive in us, we live as Christ lived (Cf. 1 John 2:6). We see the events in the world from the right perspective: from God’s perspective. Many organisations spend a lot of money and time to fight for the protection of wild animals and forests. This is important. And I support their efforts. But what worries me is that these same organisations may not fight with the same zeal and resources to protect family life and unborn babies. They do not raise their voices against the manufacture and sale of weapons to poor countries where the gullible citizens use these to kill and maim one another. The protection of wild life and the environment is important. But it is nothing compared with safeguarding the dignity of the human beings whom God loves so much that he sent his only Son to redeem them from eternal damnation. The teaching of Christ and his Church concerning the importance of family and the respect for life from conception to birth to natural death is of utmost importance. What this means is that no effort should be spared to speak up for the poor and the helpless in our society and in the world at large.

*“In the secret of my heart teach me wisdom”*

*Purge me from the folly of hypocrisy with the fire of your truth.*

*And fill me with your everlasting love. Amen.*

*Fr Damian O. Eze, MSP: Gävle, Sweden, 30 August 2009.*

