

DILIGES DOMINUM DEUM TUUM

A Sermon for the Thirtieth Sunday of the Year (A)

St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.

Texts: Exodus 22: 21-28; Ps.17; Thess. 1: 5c-10; Matt. 22: 34-40.

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.” My dear brothers and sisters, these words we have just heard in the Gospel Reading of today are as the Lord says, “the greatest and the first commandment”. Although the Pharisees asked the question with a wrong motive, the answer that they got was not meant just to silence them. It was also meant for their salvation. And for us, it is meant for our instruction, our edification and our salvation. What the Lord quoted is the summary of the rule of life for the Chosen people, the people of Israel. They were expected to know it, to recite it, to proclaim it, to live according to it and to impart the knowledge to their children (Cf. Ex. 6:5-7). This was to show how important it was. This law is as important today as it was at that time. But before we can better understand what we are saying, let us listen again to what the Lord also said. “The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as your yourself (Lev. 19:18). On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.”

The second commandment is effectively explained for us in the First Reading of today. We must treat others as we would like to be treated – with respect, dignity and compassion. The people who are weak in society, the widows, the orphans, the strangers are dear to God. This reminds us of the need for us Christians to have a humane attitude towards people from other countries and cultures and not to simply treat them as “immigrants” or worse, “asylum seekers”. We should love them and respect them as fellow children of God – as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The great lesson hidden in the answer that the Lord gave is in fact that He, the Lord Jesus is not just a teacher of the Law but the One in whom the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled. The Pharisees literally wore the letters of Law on their persons and taught others about the Law. But He criticised them heavily for not living according to (the spirit of) the Law. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus by the example of His own life points to Himself as the One who, not only knows the Law but the One who has lived it and fulfilled it. The Apostle John understood this teaching of the Lord that is based, not on mere precepts but grounded on the example of His life and mission. It is therefore St John who helps us to answer the two important questions that arise in our minds as we listen to the Lord. The two questions are: one, how can we truly love God above everything? The second is how can we truly love our neighbour as we love ourselves? The Apostle teaches that we can only love God if we realise that He loved us first: “This is the revelation of God’s love for us, that God sent his Son into the world that we might have life through him. Love consists in this: it is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent his Son to expiate our sins” (1 John 4: 10-11). What God is asking us to do is to love Him in return for His love for us. But how can we possibly love God enough? What shall we render to the Lord for His love, which is beyond human understanding? How can mere humans sufficiently love God whom no eyes have seen since our love is imperfect – as we are imperfect? The Love of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, came down to us as the promised Divine Visitation. He came in the form of our weak human nature to heal our brokenness and to perfect our love in Himself. And by taking on our human nature He became one with every human being. In Him, therefore, the two commandments meet and become one. For He who is true God from true God assumed our true human nature so that we who are broken and sickened on account of our sins may be saved from our self-inflicted hatred for one another. He is the One who has truly loved God above all things and gave even His own life for His neighbour. Whenever we contemplate the Cross, we learn anew that in the Lord Jesus love for God and love for humanity became one. By the same act of self-offering on the Cross, the Lord Jesus proved His love for the Father and His love

for us. To the Father He was “obedient unto death” (Phil. 2: 8) and He loved us and gave His life for us (Cf. Gal. 2:20).

In Him we learn the length and the breadth of love – the vertical and the horizontal dimensions– the love of God and the love of our fellow human beings as being inseparable one from another.

But all I have said will bear no fruit unless we pray that the Holy Spirit – the Love of the Father and the Son may dwell in our hearts and teach us and move us to break with cultural limitations and political correctness and be true members of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Invited by Love

Our Yes to give in love

His life to live in time, here below

With Love one to be at Home above.

- (From the poem: *Invited by Love* by Fr Damian O. Eze, MSP)

Fr Damian O. Eze, MSP

Gävle, Sweden

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