

HOMILY SUNDAY 30-A (Homily 02)

“The Bible in a Sentence”

(Exodus 22:21-27; Psalm 18; 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10; Matthew 22:34-40)

How would you summarize the whole Bible in just a few sentences?

Jesus does just that in the Gospel today, with his teaching to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

As we will see, that teaching that we often call new, is rooted in the Old Testament. The first reading from the Book of Exodus rings out with a clarion call for justice. God cares for the poor and the lowly, and so must God’s people. In fact, for the author of Exodus, justice is another word for love. Whereas a modern bumper sticker proclaims that if we want peace, we should work for justice, an Old Testament bumper sticker would read if we want to love, do justice.

Regarding the Gospel, both the commands that Jesus has in his reply to the Pharisees are from the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us to “Love God with all your heart, strength and mind” and Leviticus 19:18 to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

What is new in this teaching is that Jesus equates the two commandments taken from the OT and gives the second equal weight to the first. This has no equal in other literature. Love of others for Jesus is of equal importance as love for God. As Jesus tells the Pharisees, this commandment sums up the whole bible, all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets.

Paul even goes further in Romans 13 where he claims that the second commandment alone, to love ones neighbour as one’s self, sums up the whole bible. For Paul, to love a neighbour is already to love God, for as Jesus put it, “to do something for the least of his brothers and sisters is to do it to him.” Or as Mother Theresa of Calcutta taught, what we would want to do for Jesus, whom we cannot see, we should do to our neighbour, whom we can see, and we will be doing it to Jesus.

In the second reading, which continues from the previous Sunday, the Thessalonians once again earn Paul’s praise for their faith in the living and true God and in Jesus for whom they wait. They responded with faith and joy to the Word of God preached by Paul. Again they are to be contrasted to the scribes, the

Pharisees and today to the Saducees whom Jesus bested in a discussion.

Our challenge is to walk a balanced life and live both these commandments to the full, as did the Thessalonians. It is interesting that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous actually contains within its Twelve Steps a natural balance between the three components of the Great Command of Jesus.

Three of the Steps (Steps 2, 3, 7 and 11) are all about faith in God, prayer to God, in short, all about *love of God*. Coming to believe in a Higher Power, surrendering to God as we understand God, praying to God for healing of character defects and finally, seeking only the will of God and the power to carry it out through prayer and meditation, are what these Steps are all about.

Three of the Steps (5, 8, 9 and 12) are all about fellowship, sharing, in short, all about *loving our neighbour*. Admitting to another person the exact nature of our wrongs, making amends to those we have offended and sharing our experience with others as a way of trying to help them, are what these Steps are all about.

The last three Steps (1, 4, 6 and 10) are all about self-awareness or *loving ourselves*. Admitting that I am powerless over something in my life, doing a searching and fearless moral inventory of my life, identifying my shortcomings and reflecting back on our lives at the end of each day are what these three Steps are all about.

Mary Vogrinc, a 46 year old motivational speaker, is an exceptional example of someone who is living today's readings. She and her husband have fostered 53 children and adopted two of them, in addition to raising three of their own biological children. She shares the story of one of the most difficult children they fostered, a teenager named Charlene. She had a history of abuse; her face was covered with a rash, and had terrible teeth. She and her brother proved to be a handful from the first. One night, she lost her tooth, and was told to put it under the pillow for the tooth fairy. When she discovered a dollar's worth of change there in the morning, she could hardly believe that she could do what she wanted with the money, even buy candy. However, that day they went to church. When the collection basket came around, Charlene asked what that was for. Her foster parents told her that it was for those who were less fortunate than they were. They noted that she carefully put most of her change in the basket, kept only a dime and said, "I think I will just keep a little for myself." Mary was moved to tears by this parable of the widow's mite being lived out by her most difficult foster child.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a living out of the Great Command. Certainly we are loving God by our prayer and worship. We are also loving our neighbour by worshipping together in fellowship and sharing peace with others. And we are loving ourselves by our lives of worship and praise, one of the highest actions we can do as human beings.

So remember, to love God with our whole being, and to love others as we love ourselves, is to put into practice in our lives the teachings of the whole bible.