

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings offer us a timely reflection on the nature of the spirit and letter of the law. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, Moses enjoins the people Israel to love God with all of their hearts and souls. This aspiration to return to God with grateful hearts all He has given to us is not outside of our grasp. In a very beautiful way, Moses teaches the Israelites that the command to love is not ethereal or beyond their capacity to reach. By virtue of being sons and daughters created in the image and likeness of God, that commandment to love is already etched and embedded in their mouths and on their hearts. Often, it is our human nature to look outside of ourselves to find the answer to the mystery of God's love and desire for us. As Moses said, "Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" It is not always so readily apparent and obvious that the answer lies within us. We simply need to listen to God speaking to us in the various conditions and circumstances of our lives. In prayerful, silent reflection and contemplation, we can come to know how God is calling us to love because we know in an intimate way His love for us.

Amidst of all the distractions and obligations of life, it is easy to lose focus on the direction the Lord is leading us. In the final analysis, the Lord beckons us to love one another in response to how God loves and redeems us. The prophetic voice of Moses sought to re-orient and re-direct the journey of the people of Israel so that their lives would be more in conformity with the purpose for which God created them. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, speaks of Jesus Christ being the image of the invisible God who reconciles all things in the Father, surrendering himself through suffering on the cross and uniting our human condition to himself. Indeed, "all things were created through him and for him."

This reality was brought home in a very powerful way this past weekend. During the 11:30 am Spanish Mass, right before Communion, a little girl walked up to the middle of the sanctuary and called me to come over to her. As I turned around the corner of the altar, she came up to me and grabbed my hand. She tugged on my arm and pointed to Fr. Edgardo then let go of my hand and extended the handshake of peace to Fr. Edgardo. This was such a powerful and poignant reminder as well as a confirmation of Moses' insight that we don't have to look very far to express love. The beautiful and spontaneous response of this little girl reminds us that to respond to God's love and communicate that love to others doesn't need to be complicated.

This truth is expressed in Luke's Gospel of the Good Samaritan. The scholar of the law asks Jesus the definition of "my neighbor" in fulfillment of the admonition to "love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." In following the law, the priest and the Levite did what was expected of the law according to their station in life; however, in doing so, they ignored the plight of the man who had been beaten by robbers. Rather, it was a social and religious outcast and stranger, the Samaritan, who tends to the man.

Moved with compassion at the suffering of his brother, the Samaritan responds as one who has the love of God written in his heart. He serves another as he would himself want to be served in a time of distress and harm. Jesus asks the scholar, then, which of the three characters (the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan) was neighbor to the man befallen by bandits. He responds, "the one who treated him with mercy." This points to a tension we experience at times when discerning the spirit and letter of the law. In a sense, the priest and Levite did nothing wrong; they were following the law. Yet, they failed to come to the aid of their brother. They did not extend love and mercy and simply went on their way. How sad that they did not experience an encounter with a brother who was suffering and thereby enhance and enrich their own lives. This is a challenge for us as well. A good spiritual exercise for each of us would be to contemplate the scene in this Gospel, place ourselves in the character of the three individuals, and see how we would respond in such a situation. Good food for thought!

Fr. Tom