



THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Exodus 22:20 – 26
Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51
1 Thessalonians 1:5c – 10
Matthew 22:34-40

Gathering

(An unlit candle, a bible open to this week's reading from Exodus and a copy of the U. S. constitution are arranged on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

This week the scriptures invites us to look deeply into the law of love, and deeply into our hearts to see how well we include others as God includes us. Last week we reflected on tendencies toward *either-or* ways of thinking and judging. How were you able to be more inclusive in your speech and attitudes this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader prays as follows.)

Leader: Lord Jesus, shed your light upon us and on what your law of love asks of us. In the image of the crucifix, may we understand your kindness and faithfulness towards all. Write your story of love in our hearts. More and more, may it become our story, the story of our daily lives. In the

one Spirit, we pray.

All: Amen.

(The community pauses for silent prayer. After a time of quiet, members rotate in invoking the words of the wisdom figures below. To each invocation, members respond: "My God, I love you.")

I: In His love He wraps and holds us. He enfolds us for love
and He will never let us go.

(Julian of Norwich)

II: Love consists in serving God in justice, in strength of soul,
and in humility.

(St. Teresa of Avila)

III: Eternal goodness, You want me to gaze into You and see
that You love me, to see that You love me gratuitously, so
that I may love everyone with the very same love.

(St. Catherine of Siena)

IV: I am in Love, and out of it I will not go.

(C. S. Lewis)

V: Let the root of love be within. Of this root nothing can
spring but what is good.

(St. Augustine)

VI: Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all
that you do with love.

(St. Therese of Lisieux)

VII: To love God is something greater than to know him.

(St. Thomas Aquinas)

VIII: Perfection of life is the perfection of love. For love is the
life of the soul.

(St. Francis de Sales)

Act of Love

All: O my God, I love you above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because you are all good and worthy of all my love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you. I forgive all who have injured me and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured. Amen.

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HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

Reflection

While commandments about love of God and love of neighbor are both found in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5, Leviticus 19:18), in this week's gospel we see Jesus relate these commands intimately.

Now as then, the stark question confronts us, “Who is my neighbor?” Widows, orphans and aliens receive special mention in our earliest traditions. Throughout the gospels Jesus goes to great lengths to show us exactly who is our neighbor. A current issue like immigration reform invites us to reflect on exactly who is meant today, and what an appropriate response might be in light of Jesus' law of love.

Citing the scriptures we've just heard, the U. S. Conference of Catholic

Bishops tells us that immigrants of every stripe are indeed our neighbors. “Based on Scriptural and Catholic social teachings,” they write, “as well as her own experience as an immigrant Church in the United States, the Catholic Church is compelled to raise her voice on behalf of those who are marginalized and whose God-given rights are not respected.”¹

Leaders and people in the lands from which immigrants come need to examine and change the conditions that drive people to leave their home countries in the first place. Likewise, people in receiving nations need to understand the desires of others for a decent human life. We need to respect both the dignity of citizens and those wanting to become citizens. In his command to love, Jesus calls us to consider prayerfully how we already treat the immigrant, the widowed and the orphaned – in our own parish right now.

What does the Giver of law of love ask of us/you? Does the law of love compel us to define where we draw the line between who we accept and who we don't? If so, where is that line for you? Might the law of love be drawing us into the realm of paradox, where weeds grow alongside the wheat? What might it look like when no lines are drawn at all? What's a good disciple to do?

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ How many folks in your neighborhood do you know?
- ◆ Who are the aliens and the marginalized in your parish?
- ◆ How easy is it for you to connect love of God and love of neighbor?
- ◆ How compassionate to the neighbor in need are you?
- ◆ How are outsiders received in your parish? How do you respond to them?”
- ◆ What tension might you see between Jesus' law of love and the law of the land?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you hear Christ saying to

¹ <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/faq.shtml>

us in hearing and sharing his word?” “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Visit the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website (www.justice-forimmigrants.org/index.shtml) and familiarize yourself with the Church’s position on immigration reform.
- ◆ Find out how your parish helps marginalized people. Seek out a local opportunity to live out the law of love of God and neighbor in a new and creative way.
- ◆ Learn about ways your parish can help improve conditions in poor countries by visiting the World Fair Trade Organization’s website: www.wfto.com.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “You Are the Voice” The song may be found on the Internet.. When the song is complete, members gather around the candle, the open bible and the constitution for the closing prayer.)

Leader: Remembering God’s faithfulness and kindness and that we are called to be the expressions of his compassion in our time, let us pray:

The Serenity Prayer

All: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)

