



Christ in Our Neighborhood

February 19, 2020

Prayer

Lord, our God,
Place in our hearts a desire to please You
and fill our minds with thoughts of Your Love,
so that we may grow in Your Wisdom and enjoy Your Peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Commentary

1st Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

In the Book of Leviticus, God gives to the Israelites a command to love: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

This First Reading begs the question, “Who is my neighbor?” It is a question that Jesus asks in the Gospel of Luke when he offers the parable of the Good Samaritan (the least likely to be a neighbor among the Jews of the time.) Indeed, the Gospel from Matthew this weekend insists that “neighbors” must include even our enemies.

Regarding Leviticus, “neighbor” was more exclusive and referred to fellow Israelites who were under a common covenant or pact. In order to remain together as a nation, they had to love one another. Love for all Israelite members meant that the kingdom of Israel would survive for generations. A lack of love would mean a divided kingdom and a kingdom divided against itself would not survive.

This is not to say that Jews should not have loved those who were of different clans or kingdoms. However, there was necessarily a preferential love for their own people.

Question

Who do you love?

Commentary

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

As we reflected on in our First Reading, loving one’s neighbor was a means to keep the covenant of Israel intact. This was true for God as well. God promised to remain with His people if they longed to abide with Him. In other words, “God had their back!”

According to St. Paul, God has our back should anyone attack us or attempt to destroy us. This is because we are Christians and temples of God Himself, where the Spirit of God dwells within us.

St. Paul does not mince his words: “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person.”

When we speak of God’s love for us, we half expect that He has our back. We assume that God would not let us down if we were to follow Him. Our assumption is correct.

However, God demands that we have the back of our neighbor as well.

Question

How do you know God is on your side?

This week, we will be celebrating Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent.

Consider forming a group for the six-week series of Lent and helping others grow closer to the Lord as they reflect on the Sunday Scriptures.

Visit dphx.org/christ-in-our-neighborhood for information on how to form a group.

7th Sunday
in
Ordinary Time

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Commentary

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

Last week we heard Jesus say, "I have come not to abolish [the law] but to fulfill." We went through a few examples of the ways in which Jesus fulfills the law. This Sunday's Gospel includes two more examples:

1. "An eye for an eye" (or retributive justice) is replaced by "*offer no resistance to evil, turn the other cheek, go an extra mile, etc.*"

In other words, we are to leave behind a merely human sense of justice and adopt a justice of God that is sacrificial at its core. Following the example of Jesus on the cross who said, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do," our Christian sense of justice needs to surpass human justice.

2. "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy" is replaced by "*Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors.*"

In Christ, love for neighbor cannot mean only loving people within our own faith culture. In Leviticus, this exclusive understanding of "neighborly love," was a way in which the Israelites would be able to preserve their own nation.

However, in Christ, we belong to a nation that is not visible. St. Paul reminded us of this when he said, "I live in this world, but I am not of this world." Rather, we live in a world - the Kingdom of God - which does not pass away. For this reason, we will hear Jesus say in next Sunday's Gospel passage, "Do not worry about [preserving] your life," but, "Seek first the kingdom of God." In other words, take the risk of loving all people - even your enemies - because God has your back!

Question

Why is it hard to love someone who has harmed you?

This Week's Task

Ask the Lord to forgive someone who has hurt you in life.

Group Prayer

The group offers the following prayer:

Jesus, Prince of Peace,
you have asked us to love our enemies
and pray for those who persecute us.
We pray for our enemies and those who
oppose us.
With the help of the Holy Spirit,
may all people learn to work together
for that justice which brings lasting peace.

To you be glory and honor for ever and ever.

Continue with Psalm 103

Psalm

Response: The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,

and forget not all his benefits.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Conclude with an Our Father