

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 30:10-14

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy:

Moses said to the people: "If only you would heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law, when you return to the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul. "For this command that I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, 'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?' No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

***Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.***

I pray to you, O Lord, for the time of your favor, O God! In your great kindness answer me with your constant help. Answer me, O Lord, for bounteous is your kindness: in your great mercy turn toward me.

***Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.***

I am afflicted and in pain; let your saving help, O God, protect me. I will praise the name of God in song, and I will glorify him with thanksgiving.

***Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.***

"See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, may your hearts revive! For the Lord hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurns not."

***Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.***

For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. The descendants of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall inhabit it.

***Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.***

SECOND READING: Colossians 1:15-20

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Luke 10:25-37

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, *You shall 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.*" He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." But because he wished to justify himself, he

said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Gospel of the Lord

### **Reflection for the 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year C**

The first reading has a context, as readings often do. This is Moses' final discourse with the Israelite people just before he died. These are some of Moses' last words. Having said that, these are not Moses' actual words. There was no stenographer taking notes. Earlier in chapter thirty, Moses spoke of the people's return from exile. Most likely Deuteronomy was written during or after exile and Diaspora. An astute reader or listener to these words will note that Moses never said what the voice of God actually spoke. Nor does the text mention what the people heard or what was so close to their hearts. So, there is a deeper context to today's passage as well; one that leads to the understanding of just what God spoke and what God's people have heard.

The commandments and statutes of the Law can be summed up, as found earlier in Deuteronomy, in the statement, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5 The New Jerusalem Bible) That's what God has spoken and the people have heard and it is based on God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love for God's people. In our Christian tradition, Jesus is God's pre-existent and eternal Word through whom all things were made. The Word is love. Wherever love is found, we will know God's presence. Loving others is the way God's people love God.

Any time we but think of God, we turn to God. Moses introduced God's indwelling life as a reality for all who believe. God is nearer than our breath, heartbeat and blood. God will never leave God's people. Each person can know God's love within them and among them. God's presence is at once both personal and communal. As the entire Hebrew people heard Moses' message, each individual was able to take it to heart. Even though people may still journey to shrines and other holy places on pilgrimage, the only one we really need to take is the eighteen inches from our head to our heart and to the space between us and our neighbors. God is always that close.

In the second reading from Colossians, Paul has seemed to answer a single question, "Who is Jesus?" This passage is an ancient hymn to Jesus. The early Church would sing this song as they gathered for worship. Since all of us are astute readers and listeners to scripture, we hear echoed in this hymn the content of the Prolog to the Gospel of John. This hymn contains the growing community's Kerygma, which is the early Church's basic apostolic proclamation of faith

and salvation through and in Jesus. Jesus is not just the image of God, he is truly God and truly human both at the same time; God became a human being in all but sin.

Luke has told a beautiful and challenging story, today, in his narrative. Jesus has given a fine example of the rabbinic teaching style. We Catholics, especially those of us of a certain age, are used to the catechism's style. Ask a question and get a solid answer. In this passage the Jewish elder asked Jesus a specific question and Jesus responded with another question; thus eliciting an answer from the elder himself. The man already heard God's voice. It was already there in his heart and as he spoke with his own voice, he spoke with God's voice to answer his original question. But to fulfill God's Word is not easy; it is a challenge. A challenge that the man could not fully face; alone.

What follows the exchange between Jesus and the elder is the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. We, from our cultural and religious perspective, do not and, perhaps, cannot hear the real depth and challenge of Jesus' parable. There was, is still, true enmity between Jews and Samaritan. Each community saw the other as usurping the title of God's Chosen People. Think, instead, of seeing your worst enemy as requiring life-saving aid from you or you needing the same from your worst enemy. In this light, we can feel the true impact of Jesus' words to us. Not only did the Good Samaritan save the man's life, he also went beyond and above what was necessary to aid in the man's recovery and restoration to health. How do we respond to people in grave need? What is the depth and extent of our compassion and mercy for those we can't stand?

There's also a religious perspective to this story that we can miss. The priest and the Levite were ministers that served the Jewish community in temple worship and were bound by constraints of Mosaic laws of ritual purity. Jesus' story was not just a challenge to individuals. Jesus was also challenging the very institution and active Tradition of Judaism. The elder had just simplified the entire Law of Moses into the command to love God, self and neighbor. To love God is to love one's self and others, first being loved to life and faith by God.

Let me explain. Both the priest and Levite had duties in Jewish worship. They could not be contaminated by someone's blood or by a dead body. If they did they would be rendered ritually impure. They would be required to undergo a month-long period of ritual prayers and baths. Eligibility to provide service to God and people in temple worship could be a lot of work. Because of that loop-hole, they could not come to the man's aid. They had a very good and solid reason for their lack of compassion and mercy for the bloody, beaten man. Jesus has said that the requirements of Law can never trump full compassion. The Samaritan, who had no legal burden to bear, was completely free to respond in compassion for a fellow human being.

Jesus story elicits from us to set compassion and mercy for others as our primary goal. Loving our neighbor as our self is more of a challenge than we first might think. This was an exchange between two specific individuals and in a specific situation. The Samaritan assumed all responsibility for the life, safety, recovery and support of a man who was a stranger and potential enemy. Since he was coming down from Jerusalem, he had been visiting the temple there. One always goes up to Jerusalem for the city's built on Mount Zion. We think of traveling up as moving north and down as moving south. This encounter was between strangers and enemies, not friends. How much compassion and mercy can we muster for those whom we

love? We can only respond to others backed by the grace of God. Without it we will fail and in God's complete mercy and compassion God forgives us. We can meet Jesus' challenge only if we seek, actively, to tap the infinite nature of God's eternal and unconditional love. Do we have the courage to ask, who is my neighbor?

May God's grace help us to meet Jesus' challenge to love God, self and others.

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