**15th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**

**10th July 2022**

**Reading I: Deuteronomy 30:10-14**

This is part of an appeal by Moses urging faithfulness to the Covenant after his death. Moses lived about 1250 B.C. But in its present form the story probably dates from the return of the slaves from Babylonian Exile, (540-450 B.C.) because it exhibits established themes from that period. For instance it suggests the law is no longer written on tablets of stone but engraved on the heart, thus sanctioning the development of the idea of wisdom.

This same theme may be found in Jeremiah (31:31¬34) and Ezekiel (36:22-32). The return is accompanied by an interior renewal on the people's part, involving the 'circumcision of the heart' (30:6).

The basic structure of Moses’ Covenant however remains: Israel's life and prosperity depend upon the observance of the Lord's 'commandments and statutes' (30:10). Before the Exile, the Law had been thought of as legally imposed upon mankind at Sinai, whereas afterwards now it is presented as a longing welling up from within (30:11-14).

Notice how Paul picked up this idea (last sentence of the second reading v. 14) and applied it to the gospel and the righteousness that comes by faith in his letter to the Church in Rome. (Romans 10:5-8).

Hence the first reading prepares us for the gospel of the day, which features the double command of love.

**Responsorial Psalm: 68:13-37 (parts)**

Like so many other psalms, this one begins as the prayer of an individual in distress and ends on a note of assurance. Psalms such as this reflect the pattern of Christ's death-resurrection and the Christian experience of sin and justification. (N.B. Some Bibles call this Psalm 69)

**Reading II: Colossians 1:15-20**

We have three practical problems in understanding literature of the 1st century A.D. Firstly, we must constantly remind ourselves that copyright did not exist and attributing opinions to individuals is sometimes tentative. Secondly, we have to appreciate that writing under the name of a deceased hero was a well-known and accepted literary convention in both Hellenistic and Jewish circles. And thirdly, professional scribes would not only hear dictation, but also compose when just given the gist of the subject. These practices continued in his name, even after a relative had died and were not considered dishonest.

It is possible that Colossians was written by a disciple of Paul, one who revered the great apostle. If so, it is quite likely that he would have known him because of the early date of the letter. That is about 60 A.D. so not long after Paul’s execution. In that case, the author faced up to the problems and difficulties of his later age in the manner he believed Paul would have done in his own day. Today and for the next three Sundays, second readings are from this letter. Colossae, a hundred miles east of Ephesus, seems never to have been visited by Paul.

You will notice that the reading is in short lines. This is because it is thought to have been a poem, or even a hymn in praise of Christ. The first nine lines speak of Christ in terms of the late Jewish concept of wisdom—the image of God personified as the agent of creation. Lines ten to twenty refer to his on-going presence in the Church on earth.

As the source of wisdom, Christ was the first-born of creation; as the risen One, he is the first-born of the dead. As the agent of creation he brought the cosmic powers into being. In his exaltation he is their victor and the head of his body, the Church. The divine wisdom becomes incarnate in Jesus, and the incarnation reaches its climax in the cross, the source of reconciliation and peace.

The thinking underlying this idea was the result of reflection on the Apostles’ experience. This was founded on the conviction that the God who had made himself known through Jesus Christ was the same God who had created the world.

Redemption is not escape from the world, but the restoration of the created world when it had fallen into sin. The implications of this for the attitude the Christian should take toward the world are far-reaching. Christianity approves the world as God’s creation, but rejects its subjection to the powers of evil.

If we wish to know what the Christian God looks like we have only to regard the man Jesus of Nazareth, 'for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (v. 19). But, if the 'fullness' of God dwells in Christ so also does the 'fullness' of humanity. Jesus is not partly human and partly divine: he is wholly both. He is the image of God because he is the perfect human being (Gen 1:26). He is the perfect human being because his life is an expression of the reality of God.

In relation to the Church he holds absolute supremacy - he is its head, its ruler, the source of its vitality (v. 18). And, as 'the first-born from the dead' he is source of the new life of the new family of God.

**Gospel: Luke 10:25-37**

The double commandment of love has come down in two different forms. In the Marcan/Matthean form, it is Jesus who gives the command in response to a question; in the Lucan form the "lawyer" answers Jesus’ question. The answer is not original to Jesus, for it is a fusing of texts from Deuteronomy 6;5 and Leviticus 19;18. This same combination is found in Jewish literature and in the manuscripts from Qumran which shows that Jesus was abreast of contemporary issues.

Even if Jesus was not the first to combine love of God and love of neighbour, he understood that combination with a unique sense. There can be no love of God that does not express itself in love of neighbour and vice versa.

In Luke's version, Jesus' acceptance of the lawyer's reply leads to a further question on his part. He wanted to make clear that his question was not as naïve as Jesus made it appear. The result is the story of the Good Samaritan.

But the parable does not really answer the lawyer's question. It ends by showing that the lawyer is asking the wrong question. Instead of “Who is my neighbour?” the right question is “How can I be a neighbour?”

"You shall love your neighbour" does not mean that you may choose your neighbours. It does not mean that you may love some people but not others.

"Neighbourliness is not a quality in other people, it is simply their claim on ourselves. We have no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbour or not. Jesus’ attitude would have been completely new to his audiences.

The Pharisees would have excluded all non-Pharisees, while the Essenes of Qumran went even further and declared that all the 'sons of darkness,' that is, all who did not belong to the sect, should be hated. Everyone in the crowd would have assumed without question that neighbours should be limited to Jews and proselytes. The lawyer was curious to know the limits that Jesus would impose.

Though it is not explicitly stated it is certainly implied that the man waylaid on the road to Jericho was Jewish (v. 30). His nationality is not actually mentioned because the very point of the parable is that the lawyer's problem is not going to be solved in terms of nationality.

Priest and Levite refused to become involved in what, one way or another, was sure to be a messy business (vv. 31-32). The question was ‘Was he dead?’ If he was, touching the body would make them ritually unclean, and the disabilities that would cause would mean that it was not worth risking.

So, they both put legalism and ritual above compassion. In following the story, the audience would now expect the third man to be a Jewish layman and the story would clearly be an anti-clerical one. This would have fit perfectly well with many of his other stories. But, no!

The drama is that the third man, and hero of the story, is one of the despised Samaritans. He has been especially chosen to bring out the unselfishness of love. The man applied first-aid to the wounded traveller and carried him to an inn; and he did not consider that his obligations had thereby ended. Whatever a cynic might have thought of his conduct so far, the man turns out to be very much the realist. He did not navely presume on the charity of the innkeeper but paid him, in advance, to look after the victim.

At the end, Jesus got the lawyer to provide his own answer. Yet, did he really answer the original question? In v. 29 he asked: 'Who is my neighbour?' while the question that Jesus puts in v.36 is rather: 'To whom am I neighbour?' The lawyer was concerned with who could be loved and his question implied a limitation: my neighbour is one who belongs to such and such a group. The story shows that love does not have boundaries.

One cannot determine who one's neighbour is because love is not theoretical but practical. One's neighbour is any person who needs one's help, says the parable. The wounded man was neighbour to the Priest and Levite just as much as he was to the Samaritan, but while they would have theorized in the manner of the lawyer who posed the question, the Samaritan acted. The traveller was neighbour to all three; the Samaritan alone was neighbour in return. The lawyer had learned his lesson and answered correctly (v. 37).

Though the final recommendation of Jesus was addressed to the lawyer it holds a message and a warning for all Christians. We must not pause to ask ourselves: “Does this person deserve my love?” Such a question has no place in Christian life. Christian love knows no restrictions and oversteps all limits. The pity is that there are so few lawbreakers among us.

Stunning is the use to which Jesus turns the parable. His frequent originality is not something that his unimaginative disciples could have created. Jesus does not clarify a point of law, but converts law to gospel. His disciples must take the same risks with their lives and possessions that the Samaritan did!