

FIFTH SUNDAY OF OCTOBER

DATE: October 29, 2017 (30th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

THEME: Reaching Out to Former Catholics

READINGS: Ex 22:20-26 / Ps 18:2-3.3-4.47.51 / 1 Thes 1:5-10 / Mt 22:34- 40

REFLECTION BY: Ian Conturno

Reaching Out to Former Catholics

Ian Conturno

The message of Christ can be captured in three words: *God, neighbor, love*. Here Jesus shows us clear “Guidelines for the New Evangelization.” The message is drawn from divine revelation, scripture, and common sense. Jesus reminds us: “It’s time to get back to the basics.” We have to search our hearts for the values we hold as human beings and start putting them into practice. And, we don’t dare ask which of these was the greatest.

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus summarizes the commandments in love of God and love of neighbor. We also have various “formulations” of the same commandments and the moral law: “Do good and avoid evil” would probably be the most general. One who loves God and neighbor is one who does good and avoids evil. The primary dictate of our conscience is to do good and avoid evil.

To love means to go beyond matters of legislation. This is the response of Jesus to the lawyer who asks the priorities of the Law of God. Jesus took two parts of the Old Testament law about love of God and neighbor, and made these a new teaching by joining them together and calling them the basis for the whole law. He indissolubly links love of God and love of neighbor. This is also our basis of Christian love. Love is encompassing: loving God with all our will, our life, our mind. Our fidelity to God calls for no compromise or competing attachments. And, love of neighbor refers not only to those living next to you, but also those beyond boundaries, people who need the compassion of God. This love Jesus has shown us by his dying for all of us.

The first reading from Exodus gives us a concrete direction and concern for our love which would be good for our reflection today: "You shall not wrong a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." The law protects them because they are not accorded equal status in society. The law insisted on fair-handed treatment and concern for their welfare. Who are foreigners to you? Look at those who come to you in your work place, people whom you never met, those from the mountain, the uneducated. When they come to your office, how do you treat them? Do you allow them to wait for a while instead of entertaining them or just tell them to come back tomorrow? Just compare them with how you treat those you know. Love calls beyond all natural boundaries.

We are proud to call ourselves Christians, Roman Catholics. Yet, we are told that to ignore our neighbor while “embracing God” is self-defeating. The two commandments are inseparable. Sometimes it is much easier to love the God we do not see and ignore the brother or sister at our side. You may do that, but it is not the behavior of a true Christian. We cannot step over the homeless to enter our churches. Nor can we attend Mass with sincerity while determined not to speak to another person. Such actions make a mockery of faith. Today's Gospel, heard so often, is our constant reminder. Like water dripping on a rock, it can eventually make a difference. And, we pray that it will!

Father Ian Conturno is the Diocesan Mission Director and the Rector of Saint Joseph the Worker Cathedral of the Diocese of Ipil.