Tr18(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*"And the second is like unto it; though shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*

 Before looking at the beginning of Jesus' response to the lawyer some might be confused by the **end** of our Gospel where Jesus talks about David singing, "the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies my footstool".

As we all should remember this comes from a Psalm, number 110. Jesus' retort reflects the common Jewish belief back then that the coming Messiah would be of David's personal lineage (which of course Jesus was, by adoption from Joseph but also apparently by blood from Mary). Thus everyone expected another mighty warrior.

 But a much clearer, if not more cumbersome, translation would be: the Lord God said to my future offspring, the Messiah, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool. So Jesus' ends with a question to the lawyer. We could paraphrase it as: how can a father or great-great-great-great grandfather call his own offspring "**my** Lord"?

 Jesus was posing this question to show that calling the Messiah the Son of David was obviously inadequate. Since the Messiah is asked to sit at the right hand of God--always the place of a Crown Prince--the messiah must be **God's** very own son.

 With true paternity resting with God, the messiah should not be expected to be a great warrior as the all too human King David was (e.g. remember Bathsheba). The Messiah can and needs to be viewed in godlike terms, and is thus free not to be violent himself, but rather perhaps to suffer violence himself: free to accomplish a great **divine,** rather than great human work.

 At the beginning of our Gospel we have a challenge and a trap set for our Lord. Those skilled in the Law obviously had been scheming on how to have cause to accuse Jesus. Ordinary folks all around them were proclaiming him the Messiah, and he was doing all these incredible and inexplicable great actions. So they decided to ask, very indirectly, about his view of Yahweh.

 They asked him what the Greatest Law was. Every good Jew knew that everyone's first duty was to have no other gods but Yahweh. So his challengers probably thought Jesus might modify that duty? Maybe he would tell folks to love him as well as God? But of course he didn't add what they hoped.

 Jesus, however, did not simply restate the First Commandment verbatim which came forth at the fiery bush as we might at a pop-quiz. He did not just say: "I am the Lord thy God and thou shalt have none other God's but me." Instead, he said "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"

 If one takes the first Commandment verbatim though and then remembers the next three which deal further with our relationship with God (no graven images, not taking His name in vain, and honoring his day of rest) you get the idea that one **should** love God with all one’s heart, soul and mind. Putting it as he did Jesus--focusing on love--would also have put his challengers on their heels by pointing out that they were NOT full of love.

 What he **did** add was then to summarize all the Prophetic literature in one long independent clause. It is a clause we hear at the outset of each Eucharist: "and the second is like unto it, though shalt love thy neighbor as thyself".

So "loving thy neighbor as thyself" is like loving God with all ones heart, soul, and mind. Pondering this we may be asking ourselves....really is that so?? Likewise we might also ask, "is loving God and our neighbor like ourselves really what all the *Torah* and Prophetic books of the *Old Testament* are about?

 Now I would need, at a minimum, to deliver more of a fundamentalist preacher length sermon to address all the umpteen Old Testament books covering the Law and the Prophets. But I think I can **summarize** this pretty quickly.

 If one loves God with all one’s heart, soul and mind, then one loves all that He does and has done. This is not actually all that unusual and easy to comprehend. One people fall in love they just are overwhelmed with everything about the other person! We call it "infatuation". Close friends will roll their eyes and sigh, but the lover just can't stop talking about his beloved.

 If we love God, then we should just plain love and enjoy all his actions. We should find ourselves saying, "Oh my! What another glorious sunset! Oh, yet another glorious sunrise! What a canyon view!" We would also love the living things he created as well: "What a glorious flock of geese taking off! Oh, look at those trees! That pod of whales! That covey of quail! That school of fish!"

 It also includes loving his most noble creature: man. Most of us do enjoy--albeit not as fully as we should-- **nature** (mountains, plains, streams, trees, fish, and birds), but we fall down on this last one, our fellow man.

 The reason for this appears in our collect where we pray for help to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. These three sources act to lead us astray and get us thinking about ourselves. We become, as I talked about last week, **self** centered. And this keeps us from living in harmony with others and not appreciating them as we should because we see each other as competition.

 Now the Prophetic books are full of problems the Israelites have loving God and their fellow man. They are exhorted repeatedly to change their ways or else, but to no avail.

 Ultimately, not appreciating others as we should, just as not appreciating a sunrise as we should, means we have an inadequate love of its Creator, the One who created us also: God. We are not loving something about Him with all our being.

 This does not mean we spend our lives just giggling over everybody around us like a young person in puppy love. Our God given human emotions mature over time and we move out of such infatuation into earnest love.

So, a good--although still imperfect-- marker might be to regard God daily as least as we do our spouse. Marriage is after all a Sacrament and as such it is suppose to help us to learn about God and make us holier.

 So, with marriage as the best every day standard we might have what does this mean regarding our loving of God? Well, we should find ourselves thinking about Him during the day, as we do our spouse. Likewise, we should enjoy being in or coming home to His presence. With our spouse we enjoy spending time together sharing what we have (money, interests, talents). With God we should enjoy spending time in His presence and sharing our interests, talents, and, yes, money with Him.

 On that note I seem to recall that every single parish activity in my life, such as a clean-up day, pancake breakfast, spaghetti dinner, painting party, always has been a lot of joyful fun. I can not recall any time where someone went off in a huff during the day. Indeed, presence at church whether liturgies or functions works miracles weekly. People come in worried or upset and leave relaxed and at greater peace.

 Increasing time at church and with others **from** church along with our time for private reflection and time spent with spouse and grandchildren will prove wonderful at aiding growth in appreciating that last, most important, creation of God. Our fellow man will no longer "trip us up" so much in trying to love **God** as we should.

Additionally, our opening prayer is useful to keep us from becoming self centered. Doing all three more--time at church for liturgies and functions as well as reciting today's prayer-- and one quickly can find himself very happily loving God **and** our fellow man much more than we ever have before in our lives. Amen. +