



Come and See!

October 29, 2017

The Word...

A scholar of the law tested him by asking,
"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"
He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and the first commandment.
The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."
(from Mt 22:34-40)

Pondering the Word ...

I mentioned a few weeks ago I am reading a book entitled, *Go into the Streets, the Welcoming Church of Pope Francis*, a compilation of essays that delve into Francis' theology. When I read today's gospel, a brief statement from the introduction of the book popped into my head: "*Part of (Francis') concern is to avoid the temptation to intellectualize one's faith, concentrating 'only on ideas and formulations that do not result in a commitment of one's life.' ...What he wants is a concrete theological language that brings others to the gospel and to Christ.*" In other words, Francis wants to keep it simple.

I'd say Jesus is of the same mindset. At this point in his ministry, the higher ups are keeping a pretty close watch on him, and as we see today, they try to test him. His answer is concrete and to the point. No intellectualizing or complex language. And not one of those testing him could argue with his answer.

Most of us like to have the rules spelled out, with all the nitty-gritty details. It gives us the illusion of control. But long lists of laws and rules can cause us to miss the whole point of our relationship with God and with others, captured in one simple, concrete word: Love.

Living the Word...

One definition of theology is the study of the nature of God and religious beliefs. I have lots of books written by highly educated theologians. Some are way beyond me, but others seem to be able to take these complex, nuanced subjects and explain them through the use of comparisons, stories, and parables, much like what Jesus did when he taught the crowds.

If you were asked to define your theology in concrete language—language you could use to bring others to the gospel and to Christ, what would your answer be? Of course, we know our actions speak much louder than our words, but still, this makes for an interesting prayer exercise. If you don't know where to begin, think about your favorite image of or story about Christ: the caring and compassionate Good Shepherd; the unafraid, outspoken critic of hypocrisy; the teacher; the healer; the one who empowers others (that's my favorite). Then you might want to think about whether this favorite image really reflects your view of God and is the basis for your religious beliefs. If Christ is to be my model, then how does my life measure up? (Don't be too tough on yourself. It's not a judgment exercise, but a way to build awareness.)

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Oct 30: *“The leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, said to the crowd, “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day.” (Lk 13:10-17)*

Have you ever been in a situation like this? It happens in organizations with lots of rules and regulations. Someone does or says something so utterly absurd that you find yourself looking around to see if you are the only one aware of the total nonsense being presented. (I’m feeling that way these days given what’s happening in my country!) It takes courage to be like Jesus, to point out the hypocrisy and blindness of those so locked into processes and rules that even logic, much less compassion, doesn’t stand a chance. So pray for the courage to take a stand for compassion, for kindness, for common sense. We need courageous people more than ever.

Oct 31: *“For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God...in hopes that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.”(Rom 8: 18-25)*

Yes, I’d say Mother Earth is waiting eagerly...anxiously...for the children of God to wake up and free themselves and creation from the slavery of corruption. What would it be like if we could begin to reveal ourselves as God’s children right now by caring for the earth, renewing and replenishing her resources for future generations of God’s children? Have we ever considered that our own salvation—not just our human survival—is tied to the salvation of all of the God’s creation? Worth some serious thought, don’t you think?

Nov 1: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt 5: 1-12)*

There’s no adjective before the word “peacemakers.” Jesus didn’t say Jewish peacemakers or Samaritan peacemakers. He didn’t exclude Roman or Greek peacemakers. Anyone...anyone who works to bring peace is a child of God. Pope Francis is reaching out to people of all faiths, and to all people of goodwill to work for peace. He reminds us we are all saints-in-the-making, children of God. How will you be a peacemaker today?

Nov 2: *“Brothers and sisters: Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5-11)*

Hope is an attitude for living, not a wish for something specific. Ideally, our hope is in God’s providence, and that we are strong and wise enough to accept God’s will. This is not to say we don’t bring our petitions to God in prayer—God does hear us and is there beside us when our hope and faith falters. *“Prayer doesn’t change God. It changes the one who prays.”* (Kierkegaard) If you are struggling and low on hope, pray. Be open and allow the living presence of Jesus to settle deep in your heart.

Nov 3: *“I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” (Rom 9:1-5)*

Paul can get a bit dramatic at times. Though his letters were likely written in Greek, he spoke Hebrew, a language known for its exaggeration and hyperbole. Jesus does the same thing in some of his teachings (e.g., hate your mother and father, pluck out your eye, etc.). Maybe Paul does have an intense maternal instinct for his Jewish brothers and sisters, in wishing Christ’s salvation for them at the expense of his own, but he also knows that’s not how it works. All we can do as parents, as spiritual companions, as friends, is to let others see the joy and hope that faith brings to our lives, and pray that the Spirit will open our loved ones’ hearts.

Nov 4: *Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the Pharisees; the people were observing him carefully. (Lk 14:1, 7-11)*

When you hear that people are observing someone carefully, what comes to mind? I tend to imagine the worse. The observers are waiting to see if the “observee” makes a wrong move, slips up, or says something wrong or even heretical. That’s the impression we get from Luke’s Gospel, but maybe there are some at the Pharisee’s home who are withholding judgment. Could it be that the Spirit has opened the minds and hearts of some of the guests, and they are observing Jesus, not to catch or trap him, but to learn from him? Do I take the time to observe Jesus carefully, to learn and to model my own life after his? Make a commitment over the next week or so to observe Jesus closely. Dig into the gospels each day like you are reading the stories for the very first time. What do you observe about Jesus? Jot down a few notes as basis for your prayer.