

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Leviticus 19.1-2, 17-18)

Love of Neighbour

This passage from Leviticus is taken from a series of regulations in the law called the 'Holiness Code'. Israel, God's own People, must set about treasuring and imitating God's own holiness.

So, there are regulations that express the awesomeness of God by demanding reverence and care towards God's sanctuary and towards those special processes of life, conception, birth and death, where the presence of God breaks in on human consciousness. God is felt to be specially present in these sacred moments of sex, when human beings combine to create life, and in the moments of passage to life and from life.

There are also regulations that ensure that God's People treat the poor and unfortunate as God himself treated them when they were poor and downtrodden in Egypt. This is to be holy as God is holy. In particular, there must never be vengeance but, between the individual members of God's People, the same love and forgiveness which God himself shows to his People. Jesus himself will take up this demand not only in today's gospel but also in the story of the Great Commandment, where he puts love of neighbour on the same level as love of God (Mark 12.28-34 and parallels in Matthew and Luke).

Question:

Do we honour God and recognize the divine presence at these sacred moments of life?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 3.16-23)

The Temple of God

Paul is coming to the conclusion of the first section of his letter to the Corinthians. He has been chiding them for their conceit in grouping into separate cliques, making themselves followers of the various Christian leaders who have taught them at Corinth.

'Cephas' ('rock') is the Aramaic name for Peter, which also means 'rock'. Apollos was a Jewish teacher from Alexandria. 'No!' says Paul, 'the human leaders [including himself] are nothing, but you all belong to Christ.'

He aptly uses the analogy of building, for Corinth had recently been rebuilt and was continually expanding. The foundation of the building is Christ. Different materials may be used, but on the one foundation there is only one building. Furthermore, this is no ordinary building, but is the Temple of God. In it each stone is holy, because the Spirit of God lives in the Temple of the Christian community no less surely than the Spirit of God dwelt in the Temple of Jerusalem.

Later in the letter, Paul will develop this image to show that every element, every member of this holy Temple that belongs to Christ, has its special part to play. Each stone in the building is equally important.

Question:

Can a divided parish form a single Temple for God?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Gospel:

(Matthew 5.38-)

Jesus completes the Law

Following on from the four adjustments of the law in last Sunday's gospel come two more, perhaps the most demanding.

The Law of Moses had limited revenge: only a tooth might be taken for a tooth, only an eye for an eye, not life itself. Jesus, however, will not tolerate even this limited vengeance; he allows none at all. Again and again in the course of the gospel, Jesus returns to this need for unconditional forgiveness. We daringly engage ourselves to it whenever we say the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us just as we forgive . . .'

The final demand, however, is the most challenging of all. There is, in fact, no passage of the canonical scripture that encourages 'hate your enemy'. In any case, just as God lavishes his benefits of life, sun and rain on good and evil alike, so we must put no limits to our love. Only in this way - think of the first reading! - can we attempt to honour and imitate the holiness of God. This is what it means to be a son of God, 'sons of your Father in heaven': only by following in his way and by fulfilling his designs can we be integrated into his family. There can be no enmity in Christianity.

Question:

Can I really forgive with no trace of animosity?
