

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### **First reading:**

(Exodus 22.21-27)

*Fair Treatment for the Poor*

These are the very primitive laws of the Old Testament, the heart of the first law code laid down for Israel in the desert of the Exodus, before the Israelites even reached the Holy Land. 'Primitive'? Does our modern society equal them and the values they express?

The principle is to help everyone who needs help, even foreigners, widows and orphans - just as God helped the Hebrews when they were slaves in Egypt.

Men and women, made in the image of God, are God's representatives on earth, and must continue God's work of caring and healing. Anyone in need must not be humiliated, but must be given full human dignity, allowed to stand tall before his or her neighbours.

The creditor may not enter the debtor's house to hassle him, the worker must be paid on time to get his dinner, the homeless must get back his cloak for the night. The vulnerable are not to be exploited. Jesus will put this, 'You must love your neighbour as yourself', but here, too, he is only quoting the Old Testament (Leviticus 19.18).

### **Question:**

*Is the dignity of the individual sufficiently honoured in our society?*

### **Second reading:**

(1 Thessalonians 1.5-10)

*Facing the Glory of God*

At every Mass after the Consecration, we remind ourselves, 'Christ will come again', and the Thessalonians to whom Paul is writing were especially alert to this 'Second Coming' as they waited for Christ to come from heaven.

Paul had taught them that Christ has conquered death, that death is no more, and they mistakenly took this to mean that Christians would not physically die. Paul will answer this difficulty later in the letter.

We do not know what this 'Second Coming' of Christ will be, but for Christians, history has a purpose and a direction. We do know that each of us will face Christ for our individual judgment when we die. There will be no question of Christ doling out suitable penalties to me. 'No human being can see God and live.'

Faced with the stunning purity of the glory of God, I know that I will be filled with longing and love, but will know that I am not fit to enter into the pure and overwhelming love of God. Only when the dross is purged away will I be fit to enter Christ's embrace.

### **Question:**

*What does the Second Coming of Christ mean for me?*

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

## **Gospel:**

*(Matthew 22.34-40)*

### *The Great Commandment*

Familiarity with Jesus' answer to the question about the greatest commandment blunts our awareness of its startling directness. Answers could be given, singling out one of the ten commandments as the greatest, the most important basis of society.

A frequent answer to the question was and is the golden rule, existing in many cultures: 'Do not do to another what you would not have done to you.' This is basically a selfish answer, protecting my own interests.

By contrast, Jesus' answer slams home, turning away from self to God. 'Love', not 'obey' or 'adore' or 'fear' or 'reverence'. Love is not the warmth of companionship or of sex, but is the willing generosity of mother to helpless young child or daughter to helpless old parent, of wife to alcoholic husband or husband to paralysed wife, seeking no reward but the happiness of the receiver.

Paul gives a useful checklist in First Corinthians 13. The First Letter of John gives a shorter checklist: 'No one who fails to love the brother or sister whom he can see, can love God whom he has not seen.' The real interests of the recipient of love may not always be easy to find, but the spirit of giving is unmistakable.

## **Question:**

Whom do you know who really practises the commandment of love?

---