

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT - (Year A) – October 29, 2017

EX 22:20-26; PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51; 1 THES 1:5C-10; MT 22:34-40

The Scriptures in Jesus' time did **not** include the **New Testament** as the Bible does today. That **should** be obvious to anyone who stops to think about it...because the events of the New Testament had to *take place* before they could be **written about**.

This obvious fact presents a dilemma for those **non-Catholics** who identify themselves as “**Bible Christians**”, and who dismiss those whom *they* don't consider to be “Bible Christians. The problem with their position is that they would have to reject the **Apostles themselves**, not to mention **all the disciples** who followed the **teachings of Jesus** and the **Apostles**—*before those teachings were written down*, because—without a **written** New Testament, not even the first Christians would have qualified as “Bible Christians”!

These are the kinds of quandaries that arise when well-meaning people don't think logically about their approach to Scripture. **St. Peter** addressed just such a predicament when calling attention to the **complexity** of **St. Paul's** writings—namely, how people twist God's word in Scripture—intentionally or unintentionally—to their own peril. **St. Peter** wrote:

*...our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.* (2 Pet 3:15-16)

Clearly, there is much more to understanding God's written word than just reading it and interpreting it at **face value**. Otherwise, why would the **New Testament itself** warn of the danger of **misinterpretation** and **misapplication** of Scripture to the point of **destruction...self-destruction**?

Not just one's **confusion**. Not just one's **delusion**. One's *destruction*!

*Destruction* seems a little over the top, doesn't it?

**Perhaps!** Until we ask: What *kind* of destruction? Principally the **destruction** of our relationship with **God** and our relationship with **each other**. This kind of destruction **reduces** us to something **less than** we were intended to be—part of something

bigger than ourselves—part of **each other** and part of **God**. From the very beginning, God himself said, ***“It is not good that the man should be alone”*** (cf. Gen 2:18).

Why is it not good for a human being to be **isolated, alienated** and **alone**?

Because we are made in God’s image, and ***God is love*** (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). And love—***genuine love***—is **self-sacrificial** and **self-giving**. To love another authentically is to give **of** oneself...and to **give** oneself. ***It’s an investment of self in the beloved.*** Anything less than that is...well...something ***less than*** authentic love.

Jesus identified self-sacrifice as the **pinnacle of authentic love** when he said:

***Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*** (Jn 15:13)

Authentic love is not the **selfish sentiment** of a ***corrupt culture*** which **really** means “**sex**” when it says “**love**”.

**Love is not sex.** God created sex to ***express*** an already-established, authentic, life-giving love.

**Love is sacrifice.** Sacrifice, when offered for the beloved, is **proof** of authentic love.

But because sacrifice is demanding and difficult, fallen human beings routinely try to do the **least possible** while still “qualifying” for whatever it is they are after.

In his best-selling book, ***Rediscover Catholicism***, author **Matthew Kelly** identifies **three modern philosophies** which rail against our relationship with **God** and with **one another**. These are:

- **Individualism**, which asks, ***“What’s in it for me?”***
- **Hedonism**, which proclaims, ***“If it feels good, do it.”***

And ***Minimalism***, about which Kelly writes:

***“The minimalist is always asking, ‘What is the least I can do?’ A minimalist is always seeking to exert the minimum effort and receive the maximum reward.”***

Rediscover Catholicism, p. 28

**Minimalism** is clearly at work in the **Pharisees** in **today's Gospel**, though it may be hard to spot at first glance:

*When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"* (Mt 22:34-36)

This is actually a question that *could* be asked sincerely, but the Gospel tells us that this particular questioner was *testing* Jesus. He wanted to have something to use against Jesus so he set a **trap** for him. But Jesus saw right through the **ruse** because he could see right into the **questioner's heart**.

Later in **Matthew's Gospel**, Jesus would confront the Pharisees with these words:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.* (Mt 23:23)

The Pharisees were notorious for emphasizing the parts of the law they found convenient to carry out, while neglecting the parts of the law that called them to put **God** and **others** before *themselves*...in other words—to **sacrifice**.

Notice that Jesus didn't say, you don't have to do the little things, as long as you do the big things. He said, *"...these [little things] you ought to have done without neglecting the [weightier matters]."*

It should come as no surprise, then, that **minimalism**—doing the *least possible for God and others* and *still* considering oneself **righteous**—infects the **Catholic Church** today, just as it did the **Jewish synagogues** of Jesus' time.

But, how do we spot this poisonous "**minimalism**" in ourselves?

Any time we seek **shortcuts to sanctity**. Any time we ask questions like these:

*Is the Communion fast one hour before Mass or one hour before Communion?*

- **Translation:** What is the least possible effort I can make **for** Jesus and still "**get**" Jesus.

- **Corrective**: I love Jesus so much that I wouldn't even *think* of consuming "food that perishes" when he offers me "food for eternal life" (cf. Jn 6:27) in the Holy Eucharist.

*How late can I arrive to Mass and still receive Communion?*

- **Translation**: Which parts of the Mass are so *unimportant* that I can skip them?
- **Corrective**: Do I love Jesus enough to sacrifice my snooze bar, or my distractions, or my lack of discipline, in order to arrive *early* and **give all of myself** to him as he *gives all of himself* to me?

*When are my children "done" with Catechism classes?*

- **Translation**: When am I no longer *required* to drag myself and my kids to Church so *I* can get back to do what *I* really want to do?
- **Corrective**: Do I love **my children** enough to help them form a personal friendship with Jesus, since I am responsible for their eternal souls while they are in my charge?

*What is the least amount of money I can give to my parish and still be considered a "good" Catholic?*

- **Translation**: My money is mine. I earned it. I can spend it however I want. The *wealthy people* can support the parish. The Catholic Church is *rich*.
- **Corrective**: Where did my money come from and why does God ask so **little** back from me when he has given me **everything** I have including the health, strength and intelligence to be able to work?

*How far can I go with my boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancée before it's a sin?*

- **Translation**: How much can I **use** this other person for my personal satisfaction and still convince **myself** that what we're doing is authentic **love**?
- **Corrective**: How can I sacrifice my immediate desires in order to prove to my **boyfriend/girlfriend/fiancée** that I love **him/her** for who **he/she** is and not for what I get from **him/her**.

In the Gospel, Jesus refused to give the **specific** answer to the **minimalist** question. *And he won't do it for us, either!* Rather than identifying **one** law, he identified the *source* of **all** the laws, when he said:

*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.* (Mt 22:37-40)

**St. John** wrote in his **1<sup>st</sup> New Testament Letter**:

*We love, because he first loved us.* (1 Jn 4:18)

Authentic love for God and neighbor, then, is really a **response** to God's love.

But if we are to give God's love free reign in our hearts so that we can love God and neighbor *as Jesus commands*, then we must give the Lord permission to do for *us* what he did for **St. Paul**, so that we can *say*, with St. Paul:

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Gal 2:20)

To be "crucified" with Christ, as St. Paul speaks of it here, means to allow the **light** of Christ to root out the **darkness** in us; to allow the **love** of Christ to root out the **selfishness** in us; to allow the **life** of Christ to root out what is **deadly** to us and to our relationships. *And the way to do this is simply to give Jesus permission to enter our hearts and souls and clean house. We hand him the keys to our souls and say:*

**"Let it be done to me according to your word...your will...your love"** (cf. Lk 1:38)

Then it will not only be Christ who **lives** in us...but Christ who *loves* in us...because we will be able to love **God** and our **neighbor**...with *his heart*.

And then...keeping the greatest commandments will be as effortless as breathing...

Because Jesus who lives **in** us...will do it *for* us.