

Homily.5EasterC  
May 19, 2019  
Saint Bernard Church  
Deacon Tim Sullivan

In our short passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus says to the apostles: “I give you a new commandment: love one another.”

The words of Jesus are an echo of a passage in the Old Testament, from the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 19, where God tells Moses:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

In our modern culture, we have given this commandment from Leviticus a psychological interpretation. What you hear people say is that this passage means you have to love yourself first before you can truly love your neighbor.

Well, that is not what the commandment means at all.

What the commandment means is that you must love your neighbor because your neighbor IS yourself. It means every human being on the face of the earth is linked together in a powerful way by our common humanity, by our awareness that every one of us is a child of the same Creator.

This is the meaning of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospels. Jesus uses that parable to explain that our neighbor whom we must love can be a complete stranger who might even be a member of a group we strongly dislike.

In our Catholic tradition, one of the principles associated with our love of neighbor is the principle of the common good. The Church has defined the common good as follows:

“the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”

The Church adds: “A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of the human being at every level is a society that has the common good as its primary goal. The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he or she exists ‘with’ others and ‘for’ others.”

So every one of us Catholics has a sacred duty to love every person on earth. We are to imitate our Savior and our model, Jesus, who didn’t sacrifice Himself for a select few but for every human being ever born.

This raises the question: “How are we doing?” Think about how each of us is doing personally. Do we have a strong conviction that we must love and care about every person in the world in a real and genuine way. Are we sensitive to what is happening in the world to its people?

On a bigger scale, how are we doing as a society, as a country? Is life in the United States characterized by a strong, universal commitment to the common good?

One of the most significant obstacles to our commitment to the common good is our individualistic way of thinking and behaving. You might not have heard of this author, but a prominent advocate of the common good in the United States is Robert Bellah. He has written two well-respected books, *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*. Bellah believes that individualism, a pre-occupation with what each of us wants just for ourselves, is responsible for many of the problems in our society.

What is particularly interesting is that Mr. Bellah, who is Protestant, has written in one of his essays that what is badly needed to combat excessive individualism is what he calls the “Catholic imagination” and in particular the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. He points out that Catholics believe that, by participating in the Eucharist, they become immediately and physically united with Jesus, are united in a real but lesser way with other members of the Body of Christ and also with the poor and the needy, with whom Jesus so closely identified Himself.

Here is an amazing quote from Mr. Bellah, keeping in mind that he is not even Catholic:

“The Mass is the reenactment of the moment of Redemption. In every Mass, the Cross of Calvary is transplanted into every corner of the world, and humanity is taking sides, either sharing in that Redemption or rejecting it, by the way we live. We are not meant to sit and watch the cross as something done and ended. What was done on Calvary avails for us only in the degree that we repeat it in our lives. All that has been said and done and acted during Holy Mass is to be taken away with us, lived, practiced, and woven into all the circumstances and conditions of our daily lives.”

Bellah understands that when a Catholic participates in the Eucharist, he or she not only receives the body and blood of Jesus, but we also supposed to commit ourselves, with the grace we receive from Jesus, to sacrifice ourselves in some specific ways for the good of our brothers and sisters in the world.

Bellah ends his comments on the Eucharist by quoting a Catholic lay person who describes his understanding of the commitment we are supposed to make at Mass:

“The commission to ‘go in the peace of Christ to love and serve one another’ means that this is what the Mass has nourished us to do. And yet, when the priest

or deacon says the Mass is ended, that is only true in one sense.... It is not ended, it is continuing. It is an invitation to go out and put it into practice now. To do what you said you were going to do, what you tried to focus yourself on, so that you can function as a whole person, united with Christ and then as the whole body of Christ. So now you have to go out and incarnate that; that is what life is about.”

Every one of us here this evening was created by God and brought into the Catholic Church to change the world in some way by responding to the needs of others. The whole key to the specific meaning and purpose of our lives is to discern what needs God wants us to address.

The only way we will ever discover God’s specific will for our lives and make the sacrifices to live out that will is through the power that becomes available to us when we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Jesus has done His part. He gives us all the grace we need. The rest is up to us.