

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – B  
September 1-2, 2018

As we celebrate Labor Day and the blessings of our country, our readings this Sunday give us a lot of good advice on how to live our lives to do God's will so our country will be blessed.

In our first reading we see Moses speaks to the people on the importance of the Law that God is giving them. Here we emphasize the 10 Commandments. Moses comments on the Commandments, that if the people live them, nations will comment on how close God is to them. This is unheard of, as the pagan gods did not care about their followers or people; but here God is traveling with them, living with them and providing for them. How blessed they are! And so the 10 commandments begin with the first 3 reminding them that there is only one God who loves them and deserves love and respect in return. If they do not turn to other gods, or if especially they do not play god over others themselves, then God will care for them as His beloved family and they will be blessed and provided for even to giving them a day off a week to thank God, to rest and enjoy life with their families. This was unheard of as only the wealthy and powerful did not have to work 365 days a year as servants or slaves. Put God first and God will put you first and you and your families will be blessed.

Not only that, but people of other nations will comment on how wise and intelligent they are when they hear about the Commandments and laws based on them, because there was never a set of laws so just and fair to all people. The laws of most nations were based on who is the strongest, might makes right. The code of Hammurabi, was considered the most just which broke people up into social classes. You had to respect the people in your class level and those upper classes above you, but you could take advantage of the lower classes under you. But the Commandments apply to all no matter who they are, master and servant. As God cares for all His children - so we are asked to care for all our brothers and sisters no matter who they may be, rich or poor, strong or weak, native or foreigner. The litmus test of the people - if they were living the Commandments and if they would be blessed by God, was how the defenseless were treated: The orphan, the widow and the foreigner (remember you were aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt,) who had no family to protect them. So when we look at the commandments they are not old fashioned and out of date but all justice is based on them. All people have the right to a loving family life – the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, all people have a right to life – the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, all people have a right to have their bodies respected as images of God and temples of the Holy Spirit – the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, all people have a right to have the food, clothing, shelter and property they need to live – the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment, all people have the right to have their reputations and good names respected – the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, and on top of that we should not even think about doing injury to our neighbor or their property but think of all with respect – the 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments. If we do this we are truly a just and fair society that will be blessed. In how many countries in the world do we find powerful dictators abusing the rights of the weak, and ordinary people suffering from injustice in their own homelands? How blessed we are and should be thankful for our blessings, that we are not a nation people flee from, but one that sets an example of what people want for themselves and their families. When we follow the commandments we are truly a just and blessed nation. But we need to see where we as a nation or community are not treating others fairly and do what we can each to reach out to them as God cares for us.

St. James emphasizes that if we are people of faith, hearing the Word of God, that it is not just enough to hear it - but that we need to do it, to live it as a way of life. We need to bring God's love and respect to others, we need to do what Jesus did: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Jesus goes on in the Gospel to explain how to keep unstained by the world. Does unstained just mean we need to remain physically clean. Part of the Jewish laws were food laws and cleanliness laws. The Jews had great laws of sanitation that other peoples didn't – many of which we take for granted today. When they brought food from the market they would wash it before eating it, they washed their hands before eating, they washed their dishes before they ate off them, they washed the clothes and bedding. This sounds strange to us today as this is expected, but it was unusual for the time and the Jewish nation stood out because of their laws of hygiene. But at times Jesus

points out that they could get so concerned about keeping themselves clean on the outside that they forgot the more important part of keeping themselves clean on the inside with their words, actions and attitudes which could easily be stained by the attitudes and actions of the world around them - forgetting the purpose of the Commandments primarily as laws of love and respect and justice for all.

“Hear me and understand. Nothing that enters one from the outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.” “From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastely, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”

So Jesus is not saying we should not wash our hands, food or dishes but that we first of all if wish to be pure and clean need to wash our minds and hearts from the thoughts, emotions, and attitudes that make us want to play God over others, (breaking the first 3 commandments “I am God you shall have no other – not even you.”) When we get those attitudes in our heart of playing God, putting others down, that others don’t have rights, that others can be used and abused, then that comes out in our actions against the defenseless, the orphan, the widows and the strangers in our society. Our actions show that we are not loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength - as the source of truth and blessings and that we are not loving our neighbor as God loves us all and as justice demands. So how do we treat the orphan: the unborn and children? Are they welcomed as a gift of God and protected or are they aborted, abused in many ways, used for sexual slavery? How do we treat the widows: the elderly and the handicapped? Do we reach out and give them a helping hand in their own homes, do we provide nursing homes and assisted living or do we say they are a burden and speak of euthanasia and assisted suicide to get rid of them? What about the foreigner: the immigrant, the migrant and refugee (remember you were aliens yourselves)? Do we make them feel welcome or do we say they are not welcome and should go back where they came from? Do we play god over others or do we treat them as brothers and sisters made in God’s image and likeness?

So what do we need to do when we see this in our society? First of all, look at ourselves honestly, do we have these attitudes when we gossip and speak of others, do we look at the poor and ask why don’t they help themselves, do we look at the unborn and say their lives are not my concern, do we look at foreigners, migrants, and refugees and say they have no place in my community, do we look at others with lust as objects instead of people? If so where does all this come from that is coming out of us? We need to look at what are we putting into ourselves. There is an old computer saying: “garbage in – garbage out” What company do we keep? Parents should be aware of who your children have for friends, are the people of respect and law abiding as they will influence your children. But also who do you as adults keep company with, what are their attitudes when you are talking to one another, is it what Jesus would say? What do you read? What do you watch on TV and on the internet? Is it based on getting things and growing rich in possessions and pleasures, it is suggestive or outright pornography making objects and possessions more important than people, and making people into objects? What garbage are we putting in to get garbage out?

God gives us His commandments - that are the basis of every just society. It starts with there is only one God who loves you and dwells with you and wants to care for you. If you love Him in return by your prayer, spiritual values and the life you live - you will be blessed. Do not play god over any one, but in all your actions and especially all your thoughts and attitudes behind them, be people who show love and respect to all - especially those who cannot defend themselves: the orphan, the widow and the stranger - if you want this great country to be blessed and to be a blessing. Remember all are made in God’s image and likeness; all are our sisters and brothers and deserve justice, not only in our laws, but our daily actions, but especially in our thoughts, values and attitudes behind them all. Let us replace the garbage attitudes with those of respect for all.