



**Exegesis of the 1st reading, Ex 22:2-26**

This passage is part of a collection of divine directives clarifying what is expected of the people of Israel. Israel now has a covenant bond with God and so Israel must display this special relationship with God in the things they say and do. In this passage, their special bond with God is to be exhibited in the way they treat the most vulnerable people in their midst: foreigners, widows, orphans, and the poor. These people have no immediate family for protection. But they have the good fortune of dwelling among God's covenanted people. Keeping God's viewpoint in the forefront makes all the difference.

- 1) *Respect.* The reading begins by affirming the dignity of foreigners in Israel. Concern for foreigners was not a standard feature in the law codes of the surrounding nations. But Israel is expected to exhibit standards that go beyond the conventional. God's chosen people must re- member their own origins. God valued them when they were foreigners in Egypt, so they have every reason to value foreigners in their midst. Israel likewise has the responsibility to respect widows and orphans. If wronged, these vulnerable ones have God to turn to. And then their oppressors may come to realize their own nakedness in the eyes of God.
- 2) *Generosity.* God's chosen people also have the responsibility to be generous toward others less fortunate than they. Once again, their attitude toward the poor must go beyond the conventional standards of other nations. They must be generous because God is generous.

**Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Thes 1 :5c-10**

- 1) *Influence.* Paul celebrates the character of the faithful in Thessalonica. They received the word of God from Paul and became models of faith for so many others.
- 2) *Transformation.* In fidelity to the Gospel message, they abandoned idolatry, turned to the living God, and now await the coming of the Lord at the end of time.

**Exegesis of the Gospel, Mt 22: 34-40**

In today's Gospel, Jesus is confronted with yet another test. This time it is by a legal scholar concerning which commandment is the greatest. Rabbinic Judaism believed that there were 613 commandments in the Torah; 248 were positive



while 365 were negative. Since one could not be expected to remember all of them, the rabbis would devise summary statements emphasizing the more important commandments. Debates were frequent regarding which commandments were the most important. Jesus is here being brought into that debate.

- 1) *The question.* "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" This is no trick question. Rabbis confronted each other regularly with such an inquiry. Jesus responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 which emphasizes loving God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind. This commandment to love the Lord is not focusing on an emotional feeling. This is all about covenant fidelity that is a matter of willing and doing. Many rabbis would have chosen this very same commandment as the greatest. Here Jesus is doing nothing unique.
- 2) *The second greatest commandment.* While Jesus affirms that Deuteronomy 6:5 is the greatest and the first commandment, he continues on and declares that there is a second commandment very much like the first. Here Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 which states that one shall love one's neighbor as oneself. Here the emphasis is on the right form of self-love. According to Jesus, there is a strong and intimate connection between loving the Lord your God and loving your neighbor as yourself.
- 3) *A new commandment.* This combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18 is not found before the time of Jesus. The uniqueness is in the combination and the declaration that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. From the love of God all other laws can be derived. The rabbis said that the world hangs on Torah, temple, and deeds of loving kindness. Jesus makes the law itself depend on deeds of love. By all standards, Jesus' teaching here is clearly based on solid Jewish tradition of his day. He does not create any new laws. What he does do is take traditional teaching and bring it together in a new and creative way. He exposes a richness that was already there, but only he could see it.

### **HOMILY CONNECTIONS**

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING:

"The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems



directly from their belief in God the Creator, from their recognition of the effects of original sin, and from the certainty of having been redeemed by Christ. Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends also to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God." *St. John Paul II, January 1990 Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation #16*

"Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love of our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society...we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage woven together by the love God has for each one of his creatures." *Pope Francis On Care for Our Common Home [Laudato Si] nos. 92,93.*

**ATTENTION-GETTER:** Like most other people, Francis of Assisi had a great fear and a disdain for lepers. He avoided them at all costs. On one occasion he was riding his horse alone in the countryside, and as he rode along, he caught sight of a leper walking toward him. The leper, missing parts of his face and hands repulsed Francis. His instinct was to turn back or move off to the side to avoid contact with this poor man. But Francis, compelled by the Holy Spirit, nauseated and fearful, rode directly toward the man. He then dismounted his horse, embraced the poor man, and kissed his sores. Re-mounting his horse and turning back, the poor man had disappeared. It was then that St. Francis of Assisi realized that he had met none other than his Lord Jesus Christ.

**APPLICATION:** Jesus is calling us to see life from other vantage points and to learn from them. We are to treat others as we would want to be treated—the Golden Rule—because all are brothers and sisters and children of our heavenly Father. There can be no exceptions if we are to call ourselves Christians.

**1) "You were once aliens yourselves."**

- a) With this reminder, the author of Exodus grounds the covenantal teaching about treating aliens with respect.
- b) Israel was in a covenantal relationship with the Lord and that was to positively affect their behavior. They were to be holy as God is holy.
- c) Holiness required that their behavior was to follow different norms because



they were a chosen people. General speaking, social norms among other societies did not apply to the people of the covenant.

- d) If wronged, the vulnerable could cry out to God against his people who were not living up to their responsibility, and God would defend them.

**2) We in this country need to listen as we, too, are aliens.**

- a) Unless we are Native Americans, we—at least through our ancestors—have come to this land as aliens. We are immigrants.
- b) As the author of Exodus reminded the Israelites, we must remember our roots and treat others accordingly.
- c) As Christians, we are called to follow norms that go beyond those of our society, political parties, or any ideology.
- d) The Gospel is to be our sole guiding norm.

**3) Jesus insightfully equates these norms.**

- a) Love of God and love of neighbor are rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is not teaching something new.
- b) What is new, is Jesus' insight that these two commands are intertwined. Love of neighbor expresses our love of God.
- c) We love God no more or less than we love others. We cannot claim to love God if we don't love our neighbor as ourselves.

**4)** Francis of Assisi, transformed by that experience of embracing the leper, came to a realization that there was a special dignity and holiness in creation. He recognized that God revealed himself in the beauty and bounty of this world. Francis came to understand and reverence the fact that God had created both the world, and humanity itself, calling them both very good. And it's this understanding that led him to use familial words like sister moon and brother sun in his poetry and spoken words.

**5)** This reverence for creation is echoed by St. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, who all recognized the deep restorative power and magnificence of nature, in revealing the divine.

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6) Reverence for, and care of creation is an act of love, preserving our beautiful world for those among us now and in future generations; passing on that love of our world and our neighbor.

**TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:** As we approach the Eucharist, we approach the sacrament and source that make love of God, love of His creation and love of neighbor possible. Without Jesus' help, none of these are possible. It is this sacrifice that makes such love not only possible, but a reality. So, we truly approach this sacrament with faith, humility, and gratitude.