

15th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

Today's readings challenge us to delve deeper into the connection between law, the Lord, and love: the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy, the cosmic Lord in Paul's letter to the Colossians, and the love of neighbor in Luke's gospel.

Sadly the word Law conjures up something on everyone's mind these days. I am talking of course about Law and Order, law enforcement and the role of police in helping protect the innocent and maintain civil order. The killings that occurred last week of three more black men and of five police officers force us think about what we should and can do to preserve or restore our own and other people's trust in our judicial system and all those involved in it.

Black lives do matter, yellow lives matter, red lives matter, brown lives matter, white lives matter, grey lives matter, and unborn lives matter . We should support any groups that peacefully protest against all the forces and actions contrary to those highest values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Given the fallen state of humanity with its weakness toward excessive passions, we know there is no perfect society. No society can survive without laws to preserve peace, the tranquility of order, for the benefit of all people. Police are a necessary part of that social contract. It is easy, of course, to blame others for the tensions between races, minorities and the rich and poor. To be honest we have to examine ourselves. No one is immune to blindness, indifferences, prejudices, and greediness that are sometime blatant and sometimes subtle.

Human laws are subject to change for the better or for worse. God's Law is different. Moses tells the people that the content of the book of the Law is more than commandments written in stone from on high. It is within them, in their mouths and hearts. Those who believe there is such a thing as Natural Law would agree. I think it was St. Augustine who gave this homely argument for the reality of natural law. He said that you have only to listen to how a thief reacts when someone steals from him.

In Psalm 19 the psalmist praises the divine Law and enumerates its blessings. "The Law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul, is trustworthy giving wisdom to the simple, is right rejoicing the heart, is clear enlightening the eye, all of it is just ... it is more precious than gold. Not many can say that about all the laws of nations, our own country's laws, when they contradict our understanding of God's law.

There is still that inner struggle of opposed laws that we all know too well. St. Paul describes it as the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus that has freed us from the law of sin and death. Though we know the right thing to do, we do the wrong

thing anyway. Of ourselves we cannot keep all the laws perfectly. What wretches we are, in our divided selves.

“All praise to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Jesus accomplished the reconciliation of all things to himself by the blood of the cross. He alone can do this because he is the Son of God, who was with God at the beginning of creation, the very image of the invisible God. It was through him and for him that all things were created, both visible and invisible. He was destined to hold all in being and all together, reconciling all things to himself.

But what kind of lord is this who disrobes himself of his divine glory and takes the form of a slave, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross? He is the Lord of love. There is no greater love, he said, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friend. He has shown us the greatest love of all when he, Son of God, surrendered his life for us, even while we are sinners. When Jesus reveals his total self-emptying love by letting himself be lifted up on the cross, he draws all things to himself.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “In Christ all will come to life again, Christ the first fruits and at his coming all those who belong to him. After that will come the end, when, after having destroyed every sovereignty, authority, and power, he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. . . . When finally all has been subjected to the Son, he will then subject himself to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all. Amen!”

But we all have a long way to go. So we rightfully return to the altar to offer due thanksgiving and praise to God, and above all, to offer God the sacrifice most pleasing, his beloved Son, who invites us to unite ourselves, our sufferings and our hopes with his triumphs over sin and death and receive his pledge of a share in his eternal life. To him with God the Father and the Holy Spirit be honor, glory and praise now and forever. Amen.