a Kendall Hunt Company

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Exodus 22:20–26

Psalm 18:2–3, 3–4, 47, 51

1 Thessalonians 1:5–10

Matthew 22:34–40

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

The compilation of the Book of Exodus was the result of a long and complex process. The second half of the work (cc. 19–40) deals with the events at Mount Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments and detailed prescriptions of various sorts that flow from them. The particular section from which today's reading is taken (22:18–23:19) has to do with a variety of social and cultic matters. The three issues touched on here concern groups of people who would have been particularly vulnerable in the socioeconomic system of the tribes following their settlement in Canaan. Resident aliens, widows, and orphans, as well as the poor who

had to borrow to survive, were all "at risk" populations within a social milieu in which one's welfare and security depended upon being a property owner or at least being or having a breadwinner to provide for the household. Of particular note is the way the text connects its social policy imperatives both to Israel's own history and to the very nature of Yahweh. The Israelites had been treated compassionately by a God of love in their times of vulnerability. No less would be demanded of them now, if they were to remain faithful to their covenant relationship with that same God of mercy. Concern for the poor and weak is a distinguishing characteristic of Yahweh ("I will hear him; for I am compassionate," v. 26), and he in turn requires his people to refrain from exploiting the vulnerable. Jesus in the gospel will pick up and develop this teaching by demanding love for one's neighbor (remember who is "neighbor" in Jesus' eyes; cf. Matthew 5:43–48), and he will then link such love to the supreme command of the Torah, the love of God above all else.

Today's gospel reading is another of the controversy stories collected in this place by Matthew (this entire section concludes with verses 41–46). The question put to Jesus was not remarkable; in fact, it was a commonplace query for a rabbi of the day. Nor is Jesus' reply entirely original. Other rabbis had similarly linked the two commandments of the law before (Deuteronomy 6:5 & Leviticus 19:18). But there is something important and original about the fact that Jesus puts both commandments on a par with each other. The Pharisees had categorized the 613 precepts which they observed as "light" and "heavy," depending on their perceived importance. Jesus takes the universally recognized "heavy" precept of love of God and places it on an equal footing with the Pharisees' "light" precept regarding love of one's neighbor! For Matthew's community, restating the Lord's command to love all without partiality seems to have been an extremely important teaching (cf. Matthew 5:43–48; 7:12; 9:13; 12:1–8; 18:12–35; 25:31–46).

Catholic Doctrine

The Two Great Commandments

Jesus takes what had been two separate commandments and places them together. This new, single and greatest commandment has an enormous impact on our Catholic view of society and relationships between individuals and peoples, as well as the complex network of relationships defined as world society.

Indeed, the Church sees this mutual reliance as being based in the unity of the Trinity. The unity which characterizes God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the very impetus for the members of the human community to draw closer together. Given this view, the Church affirms the gospel truth that love of God and neighbor cannot be separated (CCC 1878) and bases all its insights regarding society on this foundation. These insights can be described as: interdependence, the common good, respecting the human person, solidarity, and the requirements of peace and justice.

The Church's view on interdependence is not merely that we are social beings but that we thrive and grow by living together in society. One of the worst forms of punishment is solitary confinement. In other words, living together is not something ancillary to human nature, rather, it is by our dealings with one another, our mutual service of one another, and our fraternal dialogue that we develop and flourish (GS 25). Catholics understand, therefore, that interdependence is a requirement of our human nature and the medium by which individuals respond to their vocation and calling from God (CCC 1879).

The Church teaches that the good of the individual is related to the common good (CCC 1905). The common good is described by the Second Vatican Council as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (GS 26). Thus, the Church insists that every group that composes society must take into account and acknowledge the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group.

Society can only be characterized as working for the common good when it is founded upon respect for the human person. Such respect means every individual be given ready access to basic necessities, such as food, clothing, housing, freedom, education, family, work, privacy, and so on (CCC 1908). Thus, as society develops, it must always uphold respect for the human person and work for more humane conditions of life for all.

In the Catholic perspective, human solidarity is an outgrowth of the avenue God has opened for us in providing holiness of life to us as a people. Jesus saves us and creates for us a Church whereby we experience the depths of our communion with God and one another. Each member of the Church gives of oneself in service to others according to the gifts given

by God, and in that rendering of mutual sacrifice solidarity is increased until it is brought to fulfillment in the kingdom. This friendship is built into our very natures and echoes God's befriending of us (CCC 1939).

Finally, the common good and human solidarity require the stability of society that peace ensures, and peace, in turn, is promoted by justice. Catholics understand that we have a concrete responsibility for one another's welfare (CCC 1913). Economic inequity and wide disparities of wealth between groups is scandalous and promotes discord and instability (GS 29). Each generation must provide the next with reasons for life and optimism. As the Church prays, "Father, you have given all peoples one common origin, and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself. Fill the hearts of all . . . with the fire of your love and the desire to ensure justice for all their brothers and sisters. By sharing the good things you give us may we secure justice and equality for every human being, an end to all division, and a human society built on love and peace" (Sacramentary, Mass for the Progress of Peoples, Opening Prayer).

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