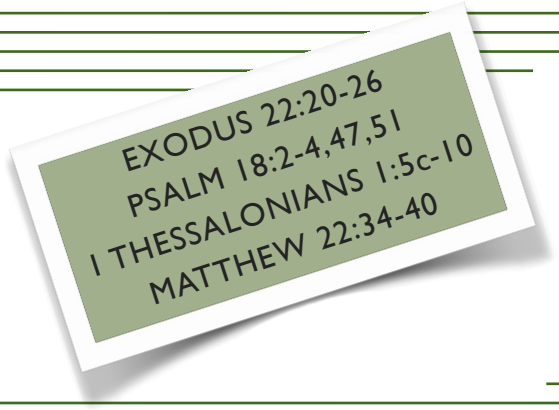
Our Sunday Readings



Laws of Love

EXODUS 22:20-26

Reading closely

1. What groups of people get special mention?
2. In what ways are these people different from other Israelites?
3. Why does God mention Egypt?
4. How serious does God sound?
5. What do these laws reveal about God?
6. Are these laws challenging?
7. As people heard these laws, how willing do you think they were to uphold them?

Living the word

8. Does your country have such laws today?
9. Do you know ways in which the Church tries to uphold these biblical laws?
10. How do you react to God's warning about his wrath (v.23)?
11. Why do you think God speaks with such vehemence?

THE FIRST READING

The Sinai Covenant

After freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God made a covenant with them in the Sinai desert. The Ten Commandments are the best known part of the Sinai Covenant.

The least among us

The laws in this passage protect those members of society who have few resources and family connections and are thus in danger of suffering from material need and exploitation.

- Although the Sinai Covenant was between God and the Israelites, non-Israelites weren't excluded from it. If ***aliens/foreigners*** were doing no harm to God's people, then they were to be treated well. Just because God's people were mistreated in Egypt doesn't mean they have the right to mistreat others.
- God instructs his people to shelter ***widows and orphans***. In the Bible these people are symbols of the poor because they often had no means of securing their own income. God warns that if stronger members of the society don't help weaker ones, then he won't help the strong.
- God wants ***debts*** to be repaid, but debts shouldn't become painful burdens on the borrower.

These commandments are a sample of the many laws that instruct God's people to help others in the same way that their just, compassionate God helps them.

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MATTHEW 22:34-40

Reading closely

1. What happened to the Sadducees?
2. What all might Jesus be thinking as the Pharisees approach him?
3. What all would you be thinking if they were approaching you?
4. Why might this particular Pharisee be the one to speak to Jesus?
5. What all might Jesus' disciples be thinking?
6. What is *the law*?
7. Imagine you're a Pharisee.
   a. How does Jesus seem to you?
   b. How do you react to Jesus' response?
   c. How do the other Pharisees react?
   d. What do you want to happen now?

Living the word

8. What's the most important thing about being a Christian?
9. Can a person fulfill only one of these two commandments and still be a good Christian?
10. What's the difference between believing in God and loving God?
11. List some Catholic laws or rules.
    a. Does each rule boil down to love for God and/or for other people?
    b. Are there rules you don't understand the purpose of?
    c. For what reasons do you break certain rules?

THE GOSPEL READING

Another test

After Jesus spoke parables of judgment against the Jewish authorities (21:28 – 22:14) they tried to trap him with questions about taxes and the resurrection (22:15-33). Now they try to trap him again.

There were hundreds of laws that Jews of this era were expected to follow. Most rabbis counted 613 of them. All of these laws ultimately came from God. If Jesus picks one law and says it's the greatest, then he would imply that all the other laws are less important.

Love is the basis of the law

Jesus quotes the *Shema,* the great Jewish prayer based on Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The most important commandment is to commit every part of one's being to God. Because God cares about people, the next most important commandment is to love others. Love for God must be demonstrated in love for others. All other commandments must be evaluated in the light of these two.

Jesus, a true and faithful Jew

Jesus' opponents believe he rejects his Jewish heritage because it often seems like Jesus throws out or ignores the Jewish law. In his response to this question, Jesus shows that he isn't preoccupied with the details of the law. His concern is instead to help people love God and other people – which is the whole point of the law.

Jesus wasn't the first Jew to link these two laws and make them foundational: other widely respected teachers did, too. Jesus' opponents are likely to have agreed with Jesus' reply.

Jesus fulfills the law

Matthew's community was rejected by Jews who thought Jesus was a false teacher. Matthew thus presents Jesus as both the true interpreter and fulfillment of the scriptures (5:17). Jesus fulfills all that God promised for the world. Therefore, the teaching of Jesus is absolute. There is no greater authority.

PRAYER

adapted from St. Vincent de Paul

O divine Savior, you came into this world to preach your gospel in delightful simplicity.

I humbly ask you to let me learn from your example. Make me acquire your spirit of simplicity. By your grace may I spread your word in a simple and direct manner for the spiritual well-being of others.

O my dear Savior, pour your spirit of simplicity into my heart so that I may be your true apostle by always cooperating with your grace.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.