

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Deuteronomy 30:10-14

The title “Deuteronomy” comes from the Septuagint *deuteronomion* (meaning “second law”). Moses is addressing a new generation of Israelites, all those who would have been under the age of twenty when the exodus began almost forty years earlier. These “new” Israelites are gathered in Moab to hear Moses restate the Law to them. This was necessary because their parents had committed apostasy in making the golden calf and by worshiping Baal-Peor by which they had thereby defiled themselves. The covenant of Deuteronomy is different from the Sinai covenant. Deuteronomy itself in 29:1 makes this clear: “These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant he made with them at Horeb (Sinai).”

After the golden calf, Israel deserved to die. Instead, they were placed on probation, under the strict legal supervision of the Levites, with Moses as the court-appointed guardian and probation officer. After many probationary violations, Israel was re-sentenced to forty years of detention and hard labor in the desert. At the release date, a parole hearing was held on the plains of Moab, where it was determined that Israel was not truly rehabilitated.

In Deuteronomy God retained many of the original terms of Israel's initial probation. They had to remain under Levitical supervision, while Joshua replaced Moses as Israel's guardian. However, the Judge realized the need to add three new sets of conditions for living at home: legal concessions, ritual stipulations and redemptive curses.

The legal concessions are permission of such things as divorce and remarriage, foreign slave-wives, and genocidal warfare against Canaanites; these are a downward adjustment on God's part to a more realistic level of expectations for a sinful Israel. At the same time however, priests and Levites had to follow a much stricter marital morality: they were not permitted to marry non-virgins or divorcees, nor presumably was divorce and remarriage allowed.

The ritual stipulations require the sacrificial offering of firstborn from the herds and flocks at a central sanctuary. These laws may be seen as a counterbalance to the first, since the second set serve to remind Israel of its call to holiness, through to a lesser degree than the Levites.

The third set of conditions, the redemptive curses, come at the time of our reading today. Moses solemnly declares with certitude that all the curses of the covenant will inevitably befall Israel at some point in the distant future. Previously, he had placed Israel under the curses conditionally, in a formal oath-swearing ceremony but now he says “. . . when

all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse. . . “

Our reading today comes from this final discourse of Moses, just prior to the selection of Joshua to lead the people into the promised land. It is the conclusion of the covenant making ceremony.

[Moses said to the people:]¹⁰ [If only you heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law,

Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) constituted the Law.

when you return to the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul.¹¹ “For this command which I enjoin on you today is not too mysterious and remote for you.¹² It is not up in the sky, that you should say, ‘Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’¹³ Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?’¹⁴ No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.

The Law is not esoteric knowledge requiring that a chosen intermediary like Enoch (Genesis 5:24) ascend to heaven in order to communicate it. It is recited in the covenant festival, and God has now put the disposition to obey it in the heart (see [Jeremiah 31:33](#); [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)).

2nd Reading - Colossians 1:15-20

This week we begin a four week tour through the Letter to the Colossians as our epistle reading.

Although imprisoned in Rome (A.D. 61-63) when he wrote this letter, Saint Paul enjoyed relative freedom in what he was allowed to do. Colossae was a city in Phrygia, about 125 miles east of Ephesus, and very close to Laodicea (now a part of Turkey). The church at Colossae was composed mostly of Christians of gentile background and had not been founded by Saint Paul himself, but by a disciple of his, Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). Paul was, however, well informed about how the church was faring. In fact, it was a visit to Rome by Epaphras that occasioned this letter because Epaphras reported to the apostle about dangerous doctrines which had recently made their way into the church, threatening both faith and morals. False teachers were introducing a series of outdated Mosaic practices – such as observance of the law of the Sabbath, identification of certain foods as unclean, and an exaggerated emphasis on the role of angels as intermediaries between God and men, which threatened to undermine the true doctrine of Christ as the only mediator.

Saint Paul uses the occasion to instruct the Colossians and to restate for them the truth about the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ, as beginning and end of all creation. He is the

true creator, conserver and redeemer, for He is the Son of God.

¹⁵ He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God,

Saint Paul is thinking of Christ as the new Adam, head of a new creation. Adam had been created to the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and commissioned to rule over all the earth (Genesis 1:28). The new head of humanity finally accomplishes this mission.

the firstborn of all creation.

As the context which follows shows, Saint Paul doesn't fall into the Arian heresy of claiming Christ was a created creature; He is before all creation; in other words, He exists from all eternity.

¹⁶ For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;

Angelic beings which are subordinate to Christ. In the false teaching of Colossae, these beings may have been thought of as rivals of Christ or beings that provided supplementary power to that of Christ. This is the only place in the New Testament where "thrones" is a category (choir) of angelic beings.

all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things,

Christ is pre-existent. He was before creation.

"Paul did not say 'He was made before all things,' but that 'He is before all things.' He is not only the maker of all, but also He manages the care of what He has made and governs the creature, which exists by His wisdom and power." [Theodoret of Cyr (ca. A.D. 450), *Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Paul, On Romans*]

and in him all things hold together.

Wisdom is the cohesive force of the universe (see Wisdom 1:7). Yahweh alone is truly wise; His wisdom is exhibited in creation.

¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church.

This statement shifts the idea of Christ as head of the cosmos to Christ as head of the Church. The community as the body is a theme present in many Pauline writings (1 Corinthians 6:15; 10:16-17; 12:12-27; Romans 12:4-5).

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,

The first who was resurrected (see 1 Corinthians 15:20; Revelation 1:5). The new beginning.

Christ's own resurrection is the cause of resurrection of those who follow Him.

that in all things he himself might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,

The fullness of God – His presence, divinity, and wisdom – is Christ, who shares this with the Church, which in turn affects all humanity. The emphasis is not on God's immanence, but on the cosmic effect of God's power working in Christ and in the Church.

²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross (through him),

The prevalent Jewish belief was that the world had fallen into the captivity of ruling world powers (angelic powers) through man's sin. Christ overcame these angelic powers by taking away their control over believers. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross made atonement for all man's sins (particularly the sin of Adam and the sin of the golden calf) and made it possible for man's sins to be forgiven and forgotten.

whether those on earth or those in heaven.

"I believe that when our Lord and Savior came, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were blessed with God's mercy. Previously they had seen His day and rejoiced (John 8:56). It is not believable that they did not profit from it later, when He came and was born of a virgin. And why do I speak of the patriarchs? I shall boldly follow the authority of the Scriptures to higher planes, for the presence of the Lord Jesus and His work benefitted not only what is earthly but also what is heavenly. Hence the blood of His cross, both on earth and in heaven." [Origin (after A.D. 233), *Homilies on Luke 10,3*]

Gospel - Luke 10:25-37

Last week in our study of the Gospel, we heard of the mission of the seventy-two as they went out as sort of an advance party to the towns Jesus intended to visit. When the seventy-two returned, they were jubilant about what they had been able to do in His name. Jesus then cautioned them not to rejoice in what they had done, but in the fact that their real reward would be in heaven. Today we hear the parable of the good Samaritan. This passage is two-pronged. While providing a powerful lesson about mercy toward those in need, it also proclaims that non-Jews can observe the Law and thus enter into eternal life.

²⁵ There was a scholar of the law

This man would have been a scribe.

who stood up to test him [Jesus] and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ He said in reply,

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

This answer combines Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

²⁸ He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”

Jesus’ comment is reminiscent of Leviticus 18:5 (see also Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5).

²⁹ But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Just like a lawyer, he wants all the terms accurately defined so that he will be sure of eternal life. It could be that the question stems from debates about who belongs to God’s people and therefore is an object of neighborly love.

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down that road,

A representative of the religious leaders of the people.

but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³² Likewise a Levite came to the place,

An assistant in the Temple. It could be that the priest and the Levite were afraid to approach the man because they thought he was dead and consequently a source of ritual defilement (Numbers 19:11).

and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. ³³ But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him

To the Jews, the Samaritans were a heretical and schismatic group of spurious worshipers of the God of Israel, who were detested even more than the pagans. In 720 BC the northern kingdom was captured by the Mesopotamian King Sargon II and most of the inhabitants were carried off. Those who remained behind intermingled with the people Sargon imported from Babylon, Cutah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim to form a new people. From that time on these people were called Samaritans. Friendly relations existed between the Samaritans and the kingdom of Judah until the deportation of Judea in 586 B.C.

was moved with compassion at the sight.

His love was spontaneous and did not have to inquire into the Law; it was disinterested, kindly, personal, and effective.

³⁴ He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then

he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

Jesus' question turns the lawyer's question on its head: Don't ask about who belongs to God's people and thus is the object of My neighborly attention, but rather ask about the conduct incumbent upon a member of God's chosen people.

³⁷ He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The lawyer can't bring himself to say "Samaritan." Because he did the Law, the outcast Samaritan shows that he is a neighbor, a member of God's people, one who inherits eternal life.