

A reading from the book of Leviticus.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel
and say to them:
‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.
You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin;
you shall reprove your neighbour,
or you will incur guilt yourself.
You shall not take vengeance
or bear a grudge against any of your people,
but you shall love your neighbour as yourself:
I am the Lord.’”

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Brothers and sisters:

Do you not know that you are God's temple
and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

If anyone destroys God's temple,
God will destroy that person.

For God's temple is holy, and

Do not deceive yourselves.

If you think that you are wise

you should become fools so that you may become wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

For it is written,

"He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

and again,

"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise,
that they are futile."

So let no one boast about human beings.

For all things are yours —

whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas

or the world or life or death

or the present or the future —

all belong to you,

and you belong to Christ,

and Christ belongs to God.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Apollos = uh-PAHL-uhs

Cephas = SEE-fuhs

Pause for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 07

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus his disciples:

“You have heard that it was said,
‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’
But I say to you,
Do not resist an evildoer.
But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek,
turn the other also;
and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat,
give your cloak as well;
and if anyone forces you to go one mile,
go also the second mile.
Give to everyone who begs from you,
and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.
You have heard that it was said,
‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’
But I say to you,
Love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;
for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,
and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.
For if you love those who love you,
what reward do you have?
Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,
what more are you doing than others?
Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Leviticus 19 is a miscellaneous collection of laws, some of them thought to come from a primitive form of the Decalogue. Verses 1-2 serve as an introduction to the whole collection, and therefore they fittingly preface verses 17-18 in today's excerpt.

Holiness means separateness, distinctiveness, from the world. It was first of all the quality of YHWH. Then, by making Israel his people, YHWH made them holy, too. This is not expressed here but is presupposed by the context of the Old Testament Law, given as it is after the exodus; it is however made clear, as far as the Christian Church is concerned, in the second reading: "God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

Holiness is first of all indicative: You are holy. But then it is also an imperative: You shall be holy. The distinctiveness of the people of God is to be shown in, not established through, their behavior. This behavior is summed up in the command to love the neighbor. In the Old Testament and in Judaism, "neighbor" meant fellow Israelite. Jesus reaffirmed the centrality of this commandment but widened the concept in today's gospel to embrace the enemy.

Responsorial Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

This is perhaps the best known of all the thanksgiving psalms of the whole psalter. The psalmist, speaking of his own individual experience of the purpose of God, transforms his personal gratitude into a corporate hymn of praise.

What precisely that personal experience was is difficult to say, but perhaps the reference to delivery from "the Pit" (sheol) in stanza 2 suggests that he had been very ill and at the point of death.

In his own personal experience he sees mirrored the experience of Israel throughout its salvation history (see verse 7, not used in this selection). The psalm praises God for his kindness and mercy, manifested particularly in the forgiveness of sins.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

The context of 1 Cor 1-4 is the divisions that afflicted the church at Corinth. People were saying, "I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos." Each group boasted of the "knowledge" (gnosis) it had received from its purported leader.

Paul begins this section by reminding the Corinthians of what they already know: "Do you not know ... ?" This is not, therefore, new teaching, not a further elaboration of Paul's foundational message, but part of his original teaching. Such divisions and such pride in the peculiar advantages possessed by each group represented a defilement of God's temple, that is, the church.

Paul uses many images for the church (garden, building, etc.), but here he uses the image of temple for the first time in his writings. “Temple” brings out the point that the church is the place where the Spirit of God is present. The church does not consist of bricks and mortar but of people; nor is it primarily an organization or institution.

Later on, in 1 Cor 6:16-17, Paul will apply the same figure to the individual Christian. There we will learn that it is immorality that defiles the individual Christian as God’s temple; here it is disunity that defiles the whole congregation.

How does this square with Mt 16:18, which says that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against the church? Answer: Local or even regional churches (e.g., North Africa) can be destroyed.

Each local church is a manifestation in microcosm of the universal church. But the church as a whole cannot be destroyed.

In the second part of our reading (1 Cor 3:18-23), Paul brings to a head the discussion of the Corinthian cliques and divisions, and the discussion of wisdom and folly.

The knowledge (gnosis) that each group claims to possess is a purely human wisdom. True wisdom, God’s wisdom, is the Gospel of the Cross of Christ. Human wisdom leads to boasting in human leaders. The apostles are not human leaders of this sort. They are not lords over God’s people but servants of Christ and servants of his people.

There is indeed an “authority of the laity” as the Spirit-filled body, balancing the authority of the ministry. But this authority is not free and independent; it is subordinated to Christ, as Christ in turn is subordinated to God (Paul’s christology here is functional and historical, not ontological or metaphysical, as it became in later christology, in which “subordinationism” was rightly repudiated as a heresy).

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48

This reading continues the Sermon on the Mount from last week. It is as we saw the part known as the “antitheses”: “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you.”

Here two antitheses are drawn out. The first is taken from the Torah: “eye for eye and tooth for tooth” (Lev 24:19). The second is a maxim that combines the commandment to love the neighbor from our first reading with an injunction not found anywhere in the Old Testament but representing much of what is taught or assumed there, namely, that one should hate the enemies of God and of Israel.

Jesus is not contradicting the Old Testament but is radicalizing it, going much further though in the same direction. For the “eye for eye” injunction was not meant to sanction revenge but to restrict it. Now Jesus rules it out altogether.

Jesus' injunction was probably formulated in opposition to the policy of the Zealots or their predecessors, who advocated armed rebellion against the occupying Roman power. The evangelist later redirected the prohibition of vengeance, applying it to the persecutors of the Christian Church (Mt 5:44).

In the mid-twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., applied Jesus' teaching of nonviolence to successive situations of a very different kind. But claims that have been made to enlist the support of Jesus' teaching for violent revolution can hardly be used to support an absolute pacifism (pace Stanley Hauerwas or Richard Hays), even though that may be the vocation of Christian individuals.

Jesus was addressing his disciples, not those who had the responsibility for government. The teaching of Rom 13, which allows the state to bear the sword for the enforcement of law and the prevention of evil, still stands as part of the canon.

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