

Friday of the Third Week of Lent
March 20, 2020
Liturgy of the Word

Readings: Hosea 13:2-10
Psalm 81
Mark 12: 28-34

Jesus does not choose one commandment. And, in a sense, he does not choose two commandments. He instead goes to the underlying structure of all 613 laws, rules and regulations of the Jewish Tradition and Beliefs.

The underlying structure of this labyrinth is LOVE. Those not “far from the Kingdom of God” (as Jesus compliments this scribe) recognize the essence of Love.

Love is an interior reality ... the inner space from which an action springs forth. No action is worth an ounce without love.

There is a story about a woman who took her aging mother into her home. The mother had had a stroke and needed time to recover. The daughter was very solicitous and painstakingly attentive to every need.

Yet even with that, an argument broke out over something very small. In the middle of the war of words, the mother stopped short and asked, “Why are you doing all of this for me, anyway?”

(Was this a question of “from what inner space is all this care coming?”)

The daughter countered and began to list all her reasons.

“I want to get you well.” She was fearful.

“I am trying to do what you need and want.” She was guilty about not doing enough.

“I am strong.” She needed her mother to know that.

More and more reasons. On and on.

The mother finally said: “Junk!”

“??Junk??”

“Yes, junk.” Then quietly she said: “You don’t have to have all those reasons. We love each other. That’s enough.”

“You are right. Really right. I am sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. Junk is fine. It’s what you don’t need anymore. I love you.”

(This story is adapted from *On Earth as it is in Heaven: The*

Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers for Year A by John Shea, Liturgical Press 2004, p. 308-308)

The daughter's actions were coming from every possible place inside her except the one place that her mother needed most. An interiority of Love.

When these two-made-one commandments are centered within us, we take on a new consciousness of interiority.

We have all been carefully schooled in the interior life. Years of prayer and faithful practice of virtue have formed our hearts – each one of us in unique ways as God tends to us and draws us ever more closely.

All of which is to recognize interiority as a GIFT with some specific benefits.

What are these benefits? We will call a few to mind.

1. Interiority (our inner space) gifts us with a delicate conscience. How well I remember sitting in the Novitiate and learning about the delicate conscience! Up until then, the reality of conscience was that terrible accusatory inner voice that made it difficult to live with myself! Now, I was to positively cultivate it? But here is the difference: It was to be a new sensitivity, not the seat of blame, but now a prayer to see as God sees.
2. Interiority has another gift that comes from this new way of seeing. We begin to notice, even in a split-second, a need, a person's demeanor, a resistance in ourselves, even a small job that we would rather ignore. Suddenly in the same split-second we choose to respond. No one knows, but ourselves that a small action was just born of love.
3. Another benefit of interiority is a different look in our eye. We take on what Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen of Pax Christi called: "The Benevolent Gaze." Different than plain looking, the Benevolent Gaze is being attentive, alert and aware in a way that is hard to describe. It is like being "with" a mysterious depth of reality in another. It is a loving glance. Even people we don't know (or even like!) can receive our benevolent gaze. It may not be noticed by the other, but something happens within us. We begin to know beyond words that here is a person just like me, with strengths and weaknesses, hope, disappointments, joys and sorrows. Within one simple gaze is recognition of the Temple of the Holy Spirit.
4. A sobering gift of interiority (that delicate conscience) may have a painful edge. We see and hear misery the way God does and the pain of it all can be overwhelming. We've lost the usual built-in protection around our hearts and now can only turn to the crucifix for Jesus' eyes in us to open the door to our hearts and let the suffering of others in.

In closing, years back as a beginner in the study of the Scriptures, I remember thinking that this commandment (two-in-one) was not a new one on Jesus' lips. What more can be said?

Then came Holy Thursday and I heard what was new: He said, "Love one another **as I have loved you.**"

Here is the underlying structure, the interiority. It is of the Divine. It is One with the One we love.

-Nancy Ayotte, IHM