

Reflection

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In the Gospel **we heard Jesus say to his disciples**, “Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill (the law)”

I don’t know about you, but I know that I never had a bible growing up. I can’t remember if I brought one to the convent when I entered 64 years ago. The Old Testament was not the focus of our religious knowledge. The emphasis was on the New Testament and church practice and laws such as not eating meat on Friday and making sure we came for Sunday Mass. You know the drill.

The author of Matthew’s Gospel **is writing to Jewish Christians who were having a crisis of faith**. They now had to choose between fidelity to Jesus and his church or their devotion to the Jewish Law and the traditions in which they had been raised. The Gospel writer narrates the theology of Jesus in such a way as to show that **Jesus, a Jew, is himself the fulfillment of the law, the prophets and of all that is of value in Judaism**. In following Jesus, the Jewish Christians would lose nothing of value in their tradition.

For Matthew, Jesus is **the promised Messiah** whose coming heralds the arrival of the Kingdom of God. **The Mosaic Law** continues to be an embodiment of the Divine will, a law **devoid of Pharisaic legalisms and patriarchal tradition** and imbued with the spirit of love and mercy that Jesus preached and exemplified.

For most Jewish people, **God is a distant God**, one reflected as caring for the community, the nation and the world. Rarely do they speak of a **personal, intimate relationship to an all loving God**. In Deuteronomy we read, “For what **great nation** is there that has its God so close to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him.” Or “what **great nation** has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”

The Psalms and the prophets, however, are full of God's love for the individual as well as the nation:

*"How precious is your love, O God,
when earthborn find the shelter of your wing!
. . . give drink to them from your Edenic stream.
For with you is the fountain of all life. . .
Extend your love to those who know you,
And your justice to those honest in their hearts." (Ps. 36:8-11)*

I find the readings in the Old Testament, especially the prophets, which we have been reading during this Lenten time very meaningful. When I know that **Jesus, a Jew, is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law**, I read the Hebrew Scriptures differently. **My personal relationship to God**, the Holy One, who loves me and our world unconditionally makes my experience of reading the prophets and the Psalms richer **and more challenging**.

Many years ago, I had the privilege of participating in an interfaith spiritual direction program. There I learned how strong in the Jewish tradition is the notion of **"tikkun olam," repairer of the world**. Jewish spirituality is expressed in "concern for the stranger, working for peace, fighting for justice, compassion for the vulnerable." We can learn much from their example.

This is a difficult time for the Jewish people, **in the nation state of Israel** and here in the US **anti-Semitism is rising**. I wonder **if most people distinguish between the State of Israel and the Jewish people?** So many are caught up in the conflict being fought by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people. Still many Jews, even those residing in Israel, **are seeking to be repairers of the world in which we all live**. Let us hold them in prayer and be grateful for the legacy of Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures and those who serve us by breaking open the Word of God, both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, for us on a daily basis.