

31<sup>st</sup> Sun. Ord. Time (B)  
St. Cecelia Parish, Ames  
Nov. 3, 4, 2018

One of the traits of a wise person is that they learn from other people's mistakes ... they do not want to make the same mistakes themselves. I am reminded of this by the reading from Deuteronomy today; it was our First Scripture.

The Book of Deuteronomy is a significant and complex work. Its theological insights ground and resource the material found in Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Deuteronomy also strongly influenced a number of the prophetic books, notably Hosea and Jeremiah. While most often the power and challenge of Sunday Scriptures come from the Gospel text, this week it seem to come from our First Scripture. Let's take a quick look at how Deuteronomy was formed historically, culturally and theologically.

Deuteronomy is a post-exilic book, i.e., it was compiled after the people had been away from their homeland and living in a foreign land. The book was formed in a time of crisis for Israel. Actually, it was compiled to help Israel survive the crisis they were in. At the time of Deuteronomy Israel's great institutions were either dead or dying ... the monarchy, the Temple, prophecy, and even her priesthood had failed. (Coincidentally, does any of this sound familiar today??) In an effort to pull Israel back from the brink of complete disaster and destruction ... Deuteronomy suggests that Israel relearn the lessons of her formative years in the desert under Moses, namely obedience to the Law of the Lord. This would be the only way for Israel to move beyond her present crisis and secure her future. And not only 'relearn', but as the last line of today's First Scripture states "Take to heart these words I enjoin on you today."

What must they relearn and take to heart? What Moses had given them years before their years of exile, namely the 10 Commandments. The First Commandment sets the tone, and is the primary one: *"I, the Lord, am your god, who brought you out of the land of Egypt that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me."* Generations later, however, ... after much fumbling, many mistakes and infidelities, and numerous futile attempts to modify and mix their allegiance to God with other cultures and social customs, The Law is restated in Deuteronomy, (which means Second Law, Second time) but uniquely different: *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our god is Lord alone .... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."* Not only is God above other gods ... the god of Israel is the only god ... the Lord alone. The experience of the Exile would hopefully lead Israel to realize that the gods of the peoples among whom they were living in Exile were as good as nothing.

As I think about this, I suggest that we take the wise approach to this and learn from the

mistake's of our Jewish ancestors. (Caveat: we are only 1 week from the terrible tragedy of anti-Semitism at Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh. By referring to the 'mistakes of our Jewish brothers and sisters, I refer only to their history, and wish no ill-will upon them.) Like them we find ourselves in a culture and society that is alien to us, not something in which we easily feel 'at home'. Like them we have become infatuated with the many new possibilities of this alien land ... material things, quick solutions to relationship problems, self-enhancement and self-growth programs, physical fitness and sports. To some these have become like gods. And regarding our own institutions, many feel that they are failing us, as did those of the ancient Jews ... where is democracy today? Is it 'of the people, or is it of only special interest groups? Is it really participative? How is the common good being served, or have individual rights smothered all sense of community and common good? Our Church is in need of cleansing and reformation itself. And the stain runs deeper than we once thought. So, like our Jewish ancestors, we need to realize that the Lord our God is Lord alone. Our God is not simply one among many other gods, but our God is the only God, and must be our primary focus. Isn't this what Jesus says to the Scribe in today's Gospel?

*“Love the lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*

Many that we know are simply too busy for the things of God. Their love is divided, and sometimes even misdirected. Many are not giving all their heart to God. And what about myself? What about you?

For me, I need to ask myself a rather probing question: do I have any feelings for God? That may seem to be an odd sort of question, yet if I truly love God, especially if I love God as I am commanded ... WITH ALL MY HEART ... I probably would have some feelings for God? So, WHAT ARE my feelings for God? Do I have any sense of excitement, any sense of longing or yearning for God? In some of his letters, Paul speaks of a genuine lust for God; his feelings for God were that intense. Or, does talk of God, and engaging in the things of God leave me without noticeable and distinctive feelings? Do I make time to spend with God in prayer each day? And not just the official prayers I am responsible for, but some real time with God for whom I have some genuine feelings?

Again the question: .... do I have any feelings for God? As natural love – only when we have feelings for someone will we ever promise fidelity and commitment to them. I think the same is true with our love for God ... when I lose feelings for God, I become uncommitted and unfaithful. Could this be what is happening all around us? Are we maybe even already making the same mistake that our Jewish ancestors did?

*“Love the lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*