

15th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C

July 13, 2013

With all your heart and all your soul

Readings: Deuteronomy 30: 10-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

While on a hiking vacation last week at Isle Royale MI, we were privileged to be able to relax at night and take in some informative and interesting lectures from the Park Rangers, followed by an informative Q and A session. Invariably, one or more people would begin their questions by saying, “I know this may be a dumb question, but...”

Thankfully, the Park Rangers were most understanding and invited all questions. I suspect people said this because they do not know the level of the other guests knowledge base, and may feel that they are asking a question to which they are the only ones in the room who do not know the answer. That is never a comfortable position in which to find oneself.

In today’s Gospel, we are privy to a question, but in this case there is a qualifier. We are told that the question was asked in order “to test him,” and we know full well the implications of that qualifier. It was the classic trap– on the surface a question, but in reality much more of a statement that revealed an agenda. The questioner here was likely a scribe, an expert in the Mosaic Law. The Greek word used in this passage is in fact the very same word used earlier in Luke’s Gospel when Jesus is tempted in the desert by the devil. Recall, Jesus said, “You shall not put the Lord God to the test.”

The questioner here was not a guest at a lodge inquiring about wildlife, but an interested scholar trying to size up Jesus. Amazingly, Jesus throws it right back in the lap of the scribe, asking him a question. After that Jesus responds– “You have answered correctly.” Disarmed, the scribe asks a follow up.

To love the Lord your God with all our heart, soul strength and mind essentially meant that love of God took precedence over everything else. The heart was the center of one's personhood to the ancient Jews, movement to God began from there. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the need to circumcise one's heart because too often the people of Israel left no room for the Lord.

When we come to worship on Sundays, are we different people from the rest of the week? Do we bring our whole selves? You came here on a steamy weekend, a weekend during which you could have been many other places. That itself speaks to your desire to give the Lord your best.

Perhaps what Jesus was saying to the scribe was that he was making his practice of the faith overly complicated. He was missing the forest for the trees. I cannot help the north woods imagery. It was so good to be away from computers and phones for a week- I cannot tell you. It was jarring at first, as I realized my dependence, but it quickly subsided.

The command that the Lord enjoins on us is not too remote or too mysterious. It is something very near to us; it is in our mouths and in our hearts. There were 613 laws for the faithful Jewish believer to follow, but none was more difficult to follow than this one because it demanded a total response.

It applies to you and me just as much as to the scribe in today's Gospel. The Lord wants all of us- heart and soul, strength and mind. He does not want to settle for second best, a lackluster effort from us. Neither should we.