Homily for the Twenty Fifth Sunday Year A_3

A priest stopped a woman after Mass and said, ***"Mrs. Smith, I haven't seen you around for a while. Is everything all right?"*** The woman replied, ***"Father, I've had some troubles. My husband died recently."*** The priest said, "***Oh, I'm very sorry to hear that," and he asked, "Did he die suddenly?"*** She said, ***"Yes, Father. It was rather sudden."***

The priest asked, ***"Did he say anything before he died? What were his last words?"*** The woman replied, ***"Yes, Father. His last words were, 'Sheila, put the gun down!'"***

This is a funny story. But it reminds us how important love, patience, and understanding are in our relationships. **When anger takes control of our hearts, love can be forgotten. Sometimes, the people who need our love the most are the very people with whom we become impatient.**

In today's First Reading, from the Book of Exodus, God tells the people of Israel, *"You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt*."

In this Bible verse, the word "***molest***" does not refer specifically to sexual abuse as the word is often understood in modern English. But it means *to mistreat, harass, or trouble someone, especially a stranger or a person who is vulnerable.*

God reminds the Israelites that they, too, were once strangers in a foreign land. They knew what it meant to suffer and depend on the kindness of others.

Therefore, God asks them to treat strangers, widows, and orphans with *kindness and compassion*. In other words, God tells them, *"Remember how you felt when you were in need, and do not make others suffer in the same way."*

In today's Gospel, a scholar of the law asks Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

The Law of Moses, found in the Torah—the first five books of our Old Testament—is traditionally said to contain 613 commandments: 248 positive ("dos") and 365 negative ("don'ts"). Among these laws, there was a longstanding debate among the rabbis about which commandment was the greatest. Therefore, though the Pharisee who posed this question to Jesus was testing Him, it was also likely a sincere inquiry.

Jesus teaches us that the greatest commandment is ***to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. God should always have the first place in our lives.*** We show our love to God *through prayer, faith, trust, and by following His teachings*. Loving God means staying close to Him in both good times and difficult moments.

Jesus also teaches us ***to love our neighbors as ourselves***. *This means treating others with kindness, respect, patience, and understanding. We should help those in need, forgive*

those who hurt us, and care for people who may feel lonely or forgotten. True love is not only about words; it is shown through our actions and the way we treat others every day.

These two commandments are the foundation of our Christian life. We cannot truly love God while refusing to love the people around us. When we love God and show His love to others, we become witnesses of His goodness in the world.

The First Reading and the Gospel invite us to examine our hearts. ***How do we treat the people in our families? How do we speak to our spouses, our children, and our neighbors? How do we treat strangers or people who are different from us? Do we respond with patience and understanding, or are we sometimes too quick to judge?***

Let us remember that love is not simply a feeling; it is a daily decision. Every day, we have opportunities to show love through a kind word, a patient response, a sincere apology, or a willingness to forgive.

Let us pray today that may our Jesus fill our hearts with His love, so that we may love God faithfully and treat our neighbors with compassion. And may our love for God become visible in the way we love one another. May God bless all of us. Amen.