

You have heard ... , but I say you ... (Deut 30:15-20; 1 Cor 2:613; Mat 5:20-37)

* After a careful study of all evidences, we've discerned the major theme of the day - *God's invitation to walk in His love*. It comes along with another theme - *the Life Together* - that is one of the three-fold aspects aimed for by our Synod for the 21st century. If prayerfully thinking over God's word on these matters, God Himself is present. At this time, He challenges our skill to build up brotherly relations in a Christian community; also He grounds our perception of fellowship on the teaching of righteousness given in (Mat 5:20-37).

* It seems suitable, if we begin a dialogue *You have heard ... , but I tell you ...*, to giving thought to the memory of our brother and sister in Christ, Aquila and Priscilla since today is a day of commemoration of these saints. With reference to the Scripture, it comments 7 times on Aquila and Priscilla's account. While reading their account, we noted that this married couple is never mentioned separately because they were coworkers in the ministry of the gospel. By the divine providence, they met with Paul in Corinth (Act 18:1-3); soon they became the much-loved friends. Working out the same purpose for Christ's sake, they succeeded in helping Paul to start the church in Corinth. It says that Paul stayed in their home almost for 18 months. Later these Christians moved to Ephesus. There they heard a man Apollos proclaiming Jesus in a local synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila realized that Apollos needed correction, they quietly took him aside and explained the teaching of Jesus more accurately, (Act 18:25,26). This couple went on using their home as a warm place for building much-loved relations with fellow Christians in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and in any other mission fields. It also says that they hosted one of the house churches in Ephesus, (1Co 16:19). Their hospitality opened the doorway of salvation to many; their effectiveness to live together witnesses that they lived according to Jesus' teaching of righteousness preached on the Mountain. No wonder that Aquila ended his life along with Priscilla, both died as martyrs says Tradition. At this moment let's respond to Paul's greeting addressed to the congregation in Rome on behalf of these fellow Christians, (Rom 16:3-4). Friends, *"Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches"* including St. Luke's in Elizabeth.

* After Priscilla and Aquila's introduction to the subject, we call your attention to God's design for a better life. You know the area where we are living is traditionally populated by Jews. There are a synagogue, educational center, and commercial company just several blocks from our church. If you pass through our neighborhood on a Friday or Saturday you'll meet here Jewish people going in a certain direction. They usually don't drive cars at this time; so there is no problem finding a place on the local parking lots, but that is another subject. Some Jews have to cover a pretty good walking distance to get to their synagogue,

but despite this fact, they go on foot anyway. By this we've learned how the devotional Jews keep "a day of rest." *No doubt, we thought, these people live under the rule of the Mosaic Law.* We didn't have a chance to learn how well Jews keep the Decalogue, except that of the Sabbath; but in fact, they have nice houses, new cars, and when their men are dressed in black suits with hats, they look to us as good as gold. After all, we ask a question, why do Jews prosper?

* The answer is found in (Deut 30:15-20), and in the attitude of those people who respect God.

The Scripture teaches that everyone who wants to prosper in this life also has to want, and in this case, to keep God's commandments. *"Look! I have set before you today life and prosperity on the one hand, and death and disaster on the other. What I am commanding you today is to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to obey his commandments, his statutes, and his ordinances. Then you will live and become numerous and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you are about to possess,* (Deu 30:15,16). Now, only imagine, if most of our fellow citizens would respect God's Ten Commandments, this country wouldn't face any kind of crises, unemployment, inflation, enormous environmental problems and catastrophes and so forth. People would escape many troubles, they would have enough money to benefit themselves and the needy ones. Therefore, folks who want to look as good as gold also have to respect God's invitation to walk in his will, (Deu 30:19).

* It is good to prosper, but if in this life only, we would be of all people most to be pitied because the best is yet to come. As we read the fragment from (1 Cor 2:6-13), it fascinates us with a message that is beyond description. Paul doesn't find any words in order to express what God has prepared for those who love him, he just quotes Isaiah who generally reflects on this matter, (Isa 64:4). From other passages we know that those who love God will be comforted beyond measure in the eschatological future, (Rev 21:1-4). It gives us hope and courage to bear burdens, to endure hardship, to suffer for truth.

* According to Matthew, the token of successful discipleship is given in Jesus' teaching of righteousness. Our text (Mat 5:20-37) includes five instructions, each one opens with the introductory words, *I say to you.* First, it is Jesus' demand for the reconciliation with an angry brother; then, his demand for the redress of our adversary; next, his demand for marital faithfulness; next, his demand for innocence of adultery; and the last, his demand for freedom from oaths. It is important to notice that Matthew doesn't provide a comprehensive commentary on Jesus' teaching of righteousness (Mat 5-7), meanwhile it might take several days to preach the entire account with all the specifics.

* Now, let's hear the first instance of Jesus' demand for the reconciliation with an angry brother (vv.21,22) that comes along with a thoughtful remark.

First, we remark on a slightly different meaning that comes out from the contemporary versions of the Bible in English. They refer to some manuscripts that omit the Greek word $\epsilon\kappa\acute{\epsilon}$ "without cause" where it should follow after "brother." But we like KJ, AV and WEB because these translations don't compromise truth for the sake of global peace. In fact, the majority of manuscripts in Greek include the word $\epsilon\kappa\bar{\epsilon}$. Therefore we read, *But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother **without a reason** shall be in danger of the judgment,* (v.22 a). Now we understand why Jesus sometimes looked at the Scribes and Pharisees more in anger than in sorrow, (Mar 3:5). Certainly, there was a reason; but if there is no reason, then, *I tell you ..., you shall be in danger of the judgment*, said Jesus.

* The 2nd instance (vv.23,24) insists on reconciliation with a brother before giving our offering. Jesus accepts our offerings and blesses us if our relation with him is unbroken. On the other hand, a broken relationship with brothers will damage our relationship with Jesus. For example, if your brother has something against you, first, you need to go and be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift, said Jesus. It is clear as crystal, an additional explanation is unneeded. However, there is an exception to the rule.

For example, imagine that if you tried hard to reconcile with a brother as you were taught, (Rom 12:18) and when you succeed in that reconciliation, the brother again finds against something else against you. Well, when you settled the new one as well, it didn't help much because the brother pointed his finger at another "guilt" trying to keep the process going until all the brothers would believe that you are a bad man. In this situation we have a right to amend *the Law of Reconciliation* with such a person because God's Spirit subjects us to himself, not to such a crafty brother. In (2Co 11:20, 21) Paul says, *For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.*

Then, the apostle makes a point. *To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that ...* " (Rom 12:18).

* Now let's briefly review what was discussed regarding the two themes of the day - *God's invitation to walk in His love*, and *the Life Together*. First, we've learned that a key to prosperity and a happy life on earth is grounded on our obedience to God, (Ecc 12:13). And second, a key to eternal happiness is grounded on our fellowship with Jesus and on our obedience to the teaching of the brotherhood in the Christian community; we got a hint of this from the lives of two saints, Aquila and Priscilla. The last important theme we attribute to Jesus. By the power of his love he brings his people together so that they have joy in sharing this all embracing love with each other. *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!* (Psa 133:1).

Beloved, encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near, (Heb 10:25).

Amen