

Oh, To Be Not Far From the Kingdom!

Intro. A few weeks ago I attended the funeral of a young man. Also there, were several friends, two of whom had never met him face to face. How then did they know him? They were part of a group who regularly played online games together. Even though they lived in California, Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts, they were connected in a community that may sound strange to some of us. Many of us don't know the neighbors in our *physical* neighborhood. Isn't that *more* strange? In today's gospel we are asked to consider how love of God and love of neighbor are the same commandment.

I. When the Lord arrived in Jerusalem, various religious and civil leaders argued with him trying to discredit him. Some chief priests questioned his authority to teach. Pharisees asked if it lawful for Jews to pay the tax to the Romans. Sadducees, using a very twisted hypothetical situation tried to argue

there is no resurrection. Each time the Lord listened, answered their argument and they went away unable to trip him up. After all these attacks, we might expect the scribe has also come to argue with the Lord. He was different from the others; he seemed sincerely interested in the Lord's thoughts on the question. With Ten Commandments and six hundred thirteen laws in Jewish culture, the question of which was the most important was often debated. Ask who is the best football team or the best singer and there are as many answers as there are fans. So in response, the Lord recited a common prayer most Jews still pray two or three times a day. It is called the Shema, from Deuteronomy and Leviticus. It was a profession of faith in one God and a commitment to follow him completely. The Lord joined another to it: love of neighbor. Call it 1-A and 1-B. The Lord could not choose one without the other. Love of God is *shown* in love of our neighbor.

Concl. The Lord didn't get loud or attack his opponents. He responded with calm reasoning which left his adversaries confounded. The scribe in today's gospel asked his question, listened respectfully to the Lord's answer and complimented him on it [S.P., p. 354]. Imagine telling the **Lord** he answered well! This is a model for how discussions between people should be. At our bible study this week someone wondered whether people who don't love *themselves* are therefore unable to love their neighbor. The attack Saturday in Pittsburgh was in Mr. Rogers' *real* neighborhood. He once said when he saw terrible things on the news, his mother told him, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." In the days since then, the helpers have emerged from the tragedy. A doctor outside the synagogue heard shooting and went to help. He was killed. Police officers responded; four were wounded. Others too went to help. There we

find the definition of "neighbor." The definition of racism is the belief a particular race is superior to another. Racism of any kind cannot see other people as the neighbor. The response of most Jewish people to this has not been anger. Part of it is because unfortunately it is all too common in their experience. They are not alone. Unfortunately, it is also all too common in our whole society. It wasn't that long ago that Catholics were one of three groups routinely discriminated against. A woman pastor said we must support each other because we are friends, family and neighbors. Our vocation in whatever our life commitments, is to be neighbor to one another. Then we too are not far from the kingdom.

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