

31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 31 October 2021

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading from Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are called to dedicate themselves completely to God.

In the Gospel passage, Jesus sums up his teaching with the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. As the Gospel says, in no uncertain terms, love of God and love of neighbor "is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices".

What does that mean for us today? It means that it is not enough for us to simply show up at Mass on Sunday. What it does mean is that we must live our faith. We must love one another. We must become participants in the life of the Church and the life of society.

This is also the major focus of the Second Vatican Council. Anyone looking at the role of lay people in the Catholic Church today cannot imagine the life of a modern parish without lay people. As we see in our own parish, the various roles that lay women and lay men take on are crucial to the life of faith formation. Of course, now after over 60 years, fewer people remember how limited and very different the role of laity was in the old days.

In the past, the role of lay people was summed up in the phrase: "pay, pray, and obey". Today the word is participation. Lay people are called to serve in parishes as well as their local communities. The U.S. Catholic bishops pointed out clearly that the lay people's sharing of their gifts and talents is "a sign of the Holy Spirit's movement in the very lives of our sisters and brothers".

In the two-thousand-year history of the Church, there have been a total of twenty-one (21) ecumenical councils. But the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was the very first to specifically address the role of lay people in the Church.

Regarding the role of lay people, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor once said that they were "to hunt, to shoot, to entertain; these matters they understand, but to meddle in Church matters they have no right at all".

Prior to Vatican Council II, lay people were passive spectators at Mass, often praying their own devotional prayers while literally "hearing" a Mass celebrated in Latin. Some laity were involved in different "works of mercy" as in the St. Vincent de Paul Society and other such groups. However, teaching religion was predominantly the role of priests and nuns. There were few lay teachers, and few lay theology professors in Catholic universities.

The goal of Vatican II is to promote the conscious, active participation of the laity in the liturgy, but also to restore a much broader and richer participation of the laity in the life of the Church as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles.

In the liturgy, lay people began to serve as lectors and Eucharistic ministers both at Mass and in bringing Communion to the sick.

While the traditional works of mercy and their respective lay societies continued, lay people took an active role in exercising leadership in an evolving new work of mercy, namely the work of advocacy: advocacy on behalf of the poor, and oppressed and exploited peoples. Indeed, lay leadership has been driving social justice work ever since the Council.

Thus, in numerous ways, lay people have become co-responsible leaders of the Catholic family worldwide. It is a realization today of the love of God and the love of neighbor.

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