

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Aug 25th 2017

Today's first reading demonstrates Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi. The Psalm is a statement of confidence in God as the source of strength and protection. The well-known Gospel redirects the focus of the 10 commandments into two more fundamental commandments.

I notice that Jesus is changing the way that we view the commandments. Of the Old Testament's Ten Commandments, 8 are prohibitions (Thou shalt not ...) and only 2 are more open-ended directives. Jesus gives two new commandments that are both of this open-ended type. When I go back to the today's first reading, Ruth is doing the right thing. It is not something that she is required to do under the law. She is living out what Jesus will eventually ask.

I often feel that I am living in a very litigious time in history. There are rules. There are interpretations of these rules. If someone is felt to cross a line, the legal conflict ensues. I feel that the spirit of the law is often lost. (A number of years ago, my oldest son was running and was struck by a car. That evening I received a call from the car owner who was concerned about the damage that was done to the car.) Today's Gospel reminds me that perhaps things are no less legalistic than they were 2000 years ago. Jesus is attempting to restore what really matters, the spirit of the law.

Last week I had my annual physical. If staying healthy only required avoiding the very bad (smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, etc.), I would be considered to be in outstanding shape. Although there are programs that define every aspect of diet and exercise, that is not the rigid adherence that my personal physician suggests. Instead I am given an open-ended health directive. This kind of guidance is much more of a challenge.

A few weeks ago, I watched the movie "Silence". The film is based on a book by Shūsaku Endō

that I read in the early 80's. The book left me confused at that time and watching the movie has me uneasy. How does one respond where the direction and the sense of God's presence and protection is not as clear as it was to the author of today's Psalm? (I can also remember Psalms that included laments and feelings of desperation.)

My prayer today follows from today's Gospel acclamation: Teach me your paths, my God,
guide me in your truth.

Heavenly Father,

You give me guidelines, but You leave me with the responsibility to fill in the details.

Life is short and the things of this world are full of distractions.

Help me to discern where and how my time and energy are well-spent.

You gave us an example in Ruth. You provided what was needed to the Psalmist.

My sense is that You did not intend life to be a prescribed path, but rather a challenge into which we are missioned.

Please Lord, guide me and strengthen me in this mission.

Mike Cherney-Creighton University's Physics Department