

August 21, 2026 - Friday of the 20th week in Ordinary Time

Ezek 37, 1-14; Mt 22, 34-40

Homily

In most societies that have not yet been overly influenced by modern Western culture, the solidarity of the clan or extended family is an extremely important dimension of the social structure. In fact, this solidarity is essential to their survival. Living conditions may be very simple and frugal; people may not have all our luxuries and gadgets, but nobody lacks the essentials. When a woman is widowed and children orphaned, they are cared for by the extended family, through a whole network of relationships. Similarly, strangers have a divine right to hospitality.

This whole social structure and network of relationships is often undermined by the imposition on these peoples of a modern type of industrial town. The result is misery and shanty towns, with people moving from one city to another in search of less poverty.

Something similar happened in Israel after the settlement in the Promised Land. People who had shared everything among themselves during their nomadic existence began to establish small private empires. Economic hardship resulted from the transition from a nomadic to an urban economy, where weak individuals became more vulnerable. Strangers, widows, orphans and many poor people starved to death with no one to come to their aid.

It was against this backdrop that some of the great prophets preached and called for social justice.

Something similar happened several centuries later, in the time of saint Benedict, when the stability of the Roman Empire was shattered by the invasion and settlement of many tribes from the north and east. It was in this new context that saint Benedict asked his monks to receive strangers and the poor like Christ. And St Gregory, in his *Life of saomt Benedict*, tells us of several occasions when Benedict gave the poor all the resources of the monastery, down to the last drop of oil.

All this gives us a broader context in which to understand the twofold precept of love in today's Gospel. We are called to love God **and** our neighbour with all our heart, soul and mind; that is, with a love that is both tender and intelligent, and that involves the whole being of the one who loves, and all aspects of the life of the person loved.

Today, as in the time of the prophets, in the time of Jesus and in the time of saint Benedict, the world is undergoing radical and rapid change. Millions of people are refugees or have emigrated to foreign lands; and even within the so-called developed countries, the weak and the small are the victims that development itself sacrifices on the altar of progress. Misery is often greater here than in so-called primitive cultures and periods.

Jesus is not calling us to a vague, sentimental feeling of sympathy for the underprivileged; he is inviting us to an intelligent love that engages the heart, soul and mind, and takes into account all the needs, both material and spiritual, of the least of these.

However, the situation is not exactly the same as it was in the days of the prophets, Jesus and Benedict. We therefore have a responsibility to find creative and new responses to new situations, both in our personal lives and in our collective existence.

Let us seek in the Eucharist -- the sacrament of love -- the source of a love that is deeper, truer, concrete and real, both towards each other and, as a community, towards those in need who come to us and also those to whom we may be invited to go.

*** And we make today the memory of saint Pius X.

Armand Veilleux