

Understanding of Holiness First Week in Lent Monday, February 15, 2016 8:15 AM
Lv 9:1-2, 11-18; Mt 25:31-46 (God identifies with our fundamental needs and he identifies with the victim.)

The gospel says that the Son of Man will judge all the nations.

That's very important to keep in mind because there were Jewish beliefs that the Lord would only judge Jews, that all the nations were lost, that salvation was only possible for Jewish people; and salvation meant eventual resurrection from the dead, so it was reserved only for Jews, but in certain sources. So the gospel makes it clear, no, **this judgment is for everybody, the whole world whether they heard the gospel or not. The whole world will be judged on the basis of how they treat people. How they treat others is how they treat God.**

Now the first reading from **the Book of Leviticus is very informative of an earlier idea of what is holiness: "I, the Lord, am holy, therefore you shall or you shall not."** All these things read this morning, every single one of them, is an implication within the very idea of holiness. If you are holy, then you cannot steal. If you are holy, you cannot lie. If you are holy, you cannot speak falsely to others or swear falsely or profane the name of God; it's contrary to the very idea of holiness. You shall not defraud or rob or withhold overnight wages or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, and so on and so on. This is an earlier idea of holiness. Sad to say, it isn't one that stuck.

Later the idea of holiness became dominated by this idea of being separate from others, from the world and from the gentile, and so a whole strategy of being a people set apart, **taking laws originally intended for the priests when they were on duty in the Temple and applying them to the whole people of Israel.** This was the idea of holiness that was prominent at the time of Jesus rather than this one, and of course he had to have conflicts with it. He had to oppose it. He had nothing to oppose in this. When asked what is the greatest law, he says to

“Love God with your heart, mind, and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself.” **This whole section of Leviticus is talking about what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. This is love. This is charity. This is justice. This is holiness. They all go together.**

Then **the Gospel of Matthew applies that to all humanity** because, after all, “neighbor” only did mean neighbor, the one near you. And because of this sense of separation **Jews did tend to think of only other Jews as their neighbor.** That’s the reason why the story of the Good Samaritan was scandalous.

So we have to understand that originally the word of God was heard among the people of God **in ancient times, and they understood very well what was required of a people God has called to himself.** Later things change for the worse and **God then extended himself further into human history by becoming one of us.** In becoming one of us **he now identifies with our fundamental needs and he identifies with the victim.** That’s the meaning of the Cross. God becomes the victim, the victim of injustice, the victim of inhumanity, the victim of malice, the victim of a lack of love and holiness. That is the basic meditation for today.