

**October 25<sup>th</sup> 2020**      Dt 34:1-12; Mt 22:34-46

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“I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there” (Dt 34:4b).

Very kind of God, isn't it? Putting the desired goal out there, unfolding before Moses with every step he takes up on the peak of the mountain. There it is, the destination of his 40 years' journey with a group of constantly complaining and ungrateful siblings in faith.

There it is and it must have felt like Moses just had to run down the mountain and his mission would have been completed; his dreams for 40 years come true. But God had other plans and Moses died before entering the Land. God gave him the honour of a burial and no one knows where exactly the grave is.

I wonder whether Moses was at peace with this fate. It was, of course, unique but there is also something very familiar.

How do teachers feel when they prepared students for years, had such an influence on their lives, and, eventually, have to let them go when they graduate?

How do parents feel at the wedding of their children?

How do founders of a company or a business feel when they have to let go of it when they retire and see someone else take over?

And how do priests feel, or also bishops, who were part of a congregation for some years or of a diocese and then have to let go?

Back to Moses. If God had just given him one more year, wouldn't that have been lovely? I picture it very bloomy and romantic with Moses moving into a nice

cottage in Galilee, tending his flowers, growing his own wine, parting his garden pond from time to time, hitting rocks in the garden and hoping for water to come out...

If I just had had this class one more year, I would have prepared them for life. My child is not ready, yet, if they would just live with us for a couple of more years, this parish would just need X number of years more of me...

Nonsense. Moses and a nice cottage. The problem with God's promise to the Israelites was that the land God had promised them had been the home to many other peoples for centuries and they weren't too cool with the thought that there is a new group settling not simply as neighbours but these newcomers wanted the whole land for themselves. The time after Moses' death was constant war and struggle. What a Blessing that God spared him that and let him die under the impression that everything was done.

For God, Moses' task was fulfilled and God would take care of the further developments. Moses had carried an incredibly heavy burden and he had failed many times, ruled as just leader sometimes and as tyrant other times, got a lot of pushback and carried it and sometimes criticising his authority was a certain death sentence.

Moses is, like in the New Testament Peter, such an example of a person living in faith: We try to make it right, we struggle, we fail sometimes, other times we do it well, but what kept him going, what kept Peter going and what should encourage us to keep going is that God always proved to be faithful.

Our Gospel today deals with one of the legacies of Moses: the Law of Moses. Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is his last week. Since his entrance into the city, he has

been in constant conflict with the religious elite. He had just had an argument with the Sadducees, the Temple elite, when the Pharisees, another religious group within Judaism at the time, approached him trying to test him by asking him about the Law of Moses.

What is the greatest commandment, Jesus?

They were waiting for his reply. Would he say something against the Law of Moses? Would he say something blasphemous? No, in his reply he combines two laws of Moses to the great commandment.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37b).

For Jesus, this is the summary of the whole Divine Law, a golden thread, the rock against which you have to dash all that is written or taught and if it breaks apart, it is not from God and not according to the Law.

A method I love when interpreting Holy Scriptures. This helps us to separate Divine Law from historical civil law from a time which is not ours. Throw the laws against this rock of the greatest commandment, and Jesus’ message that God’s love is unconditional and see whether it breaks or withstands.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind”.

Love God first. Out of true love to God flows the desire to do good to our neighbours. You cannot love God and hate humanity and God’s creation.

Does this mean that it always works out well with loving god and the neighbour? Of course not! Did Moses do a good job when he killed the Egyptian, or his critics?

No, he didn't but he tried and he was driven, all his life, by this love for God.

Give me two minutes and I could come up with a whole list of people whom I have not treated as I would want others to treat me, just in the last couple of weeks. If you count the people I have maltreated indirectly, by being part of a system and society that allows people to die on the streets, let whole nations hunger and let the ones who manage to escape drown on the way, then the list becomes unbearably long.

Worshipping together is so essential.

In worship, we make space for God to speak into our lives and for us to listen.

In worship, we re-centre ourselves together and remind ourselves and one another of the greatest commandment.

In worship, we don't have to pretend that we are perfect, quite the contrary, it is one of the very few spaces where we confess together that we have failed and are constantly failing to live up to respond to God's love by loving our neighbours and ourselves.

And worship is the space where we are reassured of God's forgiveness and are lifted up, again and again.

For our standards, Moses might not have fulfilled his task, but in God's sight he has.

In the sight of God, we can let things be and let them go, trusting that God will bring things to a close and bless them.