Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

The fundamentals of our faith are contained in two short sentences in this Sunday's Gospel for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time. In Jesus' response to the question, ‘Which commandment in the law is the greatest?’

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Everything that is found in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures depends on these few words. These two sentences are simple, straightforward, and clear, but they can take a lifetime of concerted effort to carry out. Jesus says that the second commandment is like the first because the first is born out by the second. As we read in the First Epistle of John, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God - whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:20) For some, like the rich young man, it will mean that one must "...sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Luke 18:22)

For many of us we can only begin this good work on earth, but begin we must. We must make a start in this life so that others may live. We have only to pick up the morning newspaper and scan the headlines to see that the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few. We are to ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. (cf. Matthew 9:37-38) We are the answer to the question, who will bring in the harvest? For us who have been richly blessed, much is expected. The answer to who needs our help can be found in our scripture for today from Exodus. (EX 22:20-22)

Thus says the LORD:
"You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.
You shall not wrong any widow or orphan.
If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. 22:20-22

Many have found new power and purpose in their lives by answering this call to service in their lives. Anyone who has taken a chance, given up a few hours, go out of their way to serve the needs of the poor in our community knows that the rewards far outstrip whatever we can offer. They come to know also by looking in the eyes of the ones helped, how great a gift it is when one offers oneself in service to building the Kingdom of God. They have come to realize that as God has blessed them, he also wants them to be a blessing to others. Remember what Jesus said, "Whatever you do for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40) If you want to take a chance and experience the grace of God's goodness in your lives there are many ways, right in our community of St. Andrew the Apostle Parish.

To name a few: The Knights of Columbus, who provide financial support to the Right to Life movement by the support of alternatives for young single women with a crisis pregnancy. Habitat for Humanity, who help the poor, gain home ownership through sharing their skills and empowering them through sweat equity. Grow Haiti's Children and E3 Africa, who support the orphans in both hemispheres, by providing a home, education and mentoring. For something closer to home there is the Justa Center right here in Phoenix that works to find permanent housing for the elderly homeless. Many of these folks are widows and need our help. Even if the elderly are housed in nursing homes, there is a need to take Holy Communion and share the Word of God right within our parish. There is something for everyone.

Finally, as we hear in the reading from Isaiah, in addition to the widows and orphans, some will feel the call to serve the alien among us who have been forced from their homeland, by war, religious persecution, crime, or economics. They too are God's children who cry for our help. Will we hear their call and respond in Christian charity?