

The Image of Invisible God

Fessahaye Mebrahtu

The Book of Deuteronomy can be called the summary or recap of the Torah. It can be translated as “repeating again,” revisit or renew. The first reading from Deuteronomy explains the relation of God with his chosen people and his expectation of them. First, the writer contrasts the God of Israel is not remote, impersonal or imaginary one; placing unbearable burden on his worshipers or requiring human creativity to please him. In the reading God presents Himself as personal and personable God easy to relate to. He also underlines the immanence of God and his intimate relationship with his people. The expectation, therefore, is not to observe some external laws as the reading states, “No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts;” which is very accessible, “you have only to carry it out.” The Hebrew prophets continued to remind the people of Israel saying, “I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33). The statement from Jeremiah seems to refer to the Book of Deuteronomy. In this case, our submission to God is not dependent on ritual performances find favor from God. It emanates from within, our conscience, imbedded in our hearts and minds.

God does not only put his laws and precepts in our mouths, hearts and minds, but we are created in his image and likeness. In the second reading St. Paul to the Colossians states, “Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” who also became one of us to reconcile us with his Father and restore our divine image. This brings us back to the fundamental commandment of Love of God and Love of neighbor. The scholar, who knew the fundamental concept of the God’s commandment, but he was not sure who is the neighbor who deserves his love like himself. A layman by the standard of the scholar, Jesus tells him a challenging parable, which continues to pique our conscience to really understand our Christian call and response.

In Jesus’ parable, the Samaritan man personifies everyone on the social margins, considered as ungodly but who shows compassion and love according to God’s expectation. The robbery victim is nameless, his condition put’s him on the periphery undeserving the love and compassion the religious ritualists. The Levi and Priest were so concerned with their ritual performance, they could not see a victim made in the image and likeness of God, rather as an obstacle to righteously serve God in their ritual performance.

Who is the robbed and abused person of our time, deserving our compassion? Our hypocritical mind puts us on a pedestal to judge and reject any association with the victim. Jesus is not asking us to be an occasional do-gooder. It is our attitude towards those on the margins have to change. Yes, we have to respond with compassion, which can be called a triage response. But we have to ask why people are, especially certain class, ethnic, race, gender, sector-workers in such condition? They too bear the image of the invisible God; our duty is to recognize the image of God in them. God has put the tools and the laws in our mouth and hearts to make this possible.