

2017

- *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”*
- *“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind.”*
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- When that scholar asks the question, Jesus does not hesitate: God first and foremost in all things!
- And then the second: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* ...a commandment the Jews had from the time of Moses in Leviticus 19:18.
- These are the whole law and the prophets—the teaching of all scripture.
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- In Mark’s version of a similar (the same?) event, a scribe affirms: *“You are right, Teacher...to love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”* (Mark 12:32-33)
- This is why St. John tells us: *“...this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”* (1John 5:3)...
- ...and this is why the prophet Samuel says: *“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”* (1 Samuel 15:22)
- ...and this is why Jesus tells us: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments,”* (John 14:15)...because Jesus’ instruction...His very wish...are, by definition, God’s commandments.
- And yet...whenever we interact with another person, we are also interacting w/ God...for Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that however we treat our neighbor—especially the needy and the oppressed—is how we are treating Him.
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- Last weekend we had the Gospel with the question about taxes... and remember how it was Caesar’s image on the coin for the tax?

- But give to God's what is God's, Jesus said. We are all created in God's image, and thus each have His image stamped upon us...
- ...therefore, our even greater obligation to be charitable to that image...to all persons...for when we are charitable to a person's child, we are charitable to the parent—to the Heavenly Father.

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- Now, our first reading comes in the midst of a chapter in Exodus outlining a number of laws for God's people, and our reading picks up at the treatment of aliens/immigrants/sojourners...that we treat them with the same kindness or fairness that we would our fellow citizens.
 - This directive of God on love/fairness/charity to neighbor admits to no distinctions of race, origin, etc., as far as how we treat any person we encounter. We see that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who cared even for his ancestral enemy.
 - Certainly wisdom and prudence are allowed out of care of our other neighbors, however...not enabling the criminal or the terrorist, for instance, who might destroy or prey upon those neighbors.
 - Even in the book of Sirach we read: *“Do not bring every man into your home, for many are the wiles of the crafty...for he lies in wait, turning good into evil...and a sinner lies in wait to shed blood.”* (Sirach 11:29-34)
 - So neither are we to be naïve, nor are we to be xenophobic. How to determine where lay the middle road is, of course, the center of much national debate in our day...as well as how many persons a lifeboat can take without sinking.
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 - But, regardless, concerning those persons who are in true need, there is an obligation of those with to help those without.
 - In fact, even in our reading today, we hear that to wrong widows and orphans is particularly serious sins...one that cries out directly to Heaven...and as we read: *“I will surely hear their cry [and] my wrath will flare up...”* THAT can't be good.

- ...the “widow and orphan” which can mean any legitimately without the ability to support themselves.
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- The reading also mentions a prohibition against charging interest to the poor—not adding burden upon burden—or enriching oneself at the expense of those who can barely support themselves.
- The passage of returning at night the cloak given in pledge simply refers more broadly to not withholding mercy for the suffering, or making others suffer unnecessarily.

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- And so, in the two great commandments, we see that all scripture is inexorably linked in the Christian obligation to charity...like the cross—both vertical and horizontal relationships which cannot be separated.
 - The vertical, of course, our relationship with God; the horizontal, our relationship with one another and all of our fellow man...all of us making the journey through the desert towards the Promised Land... all children of the Heavenly Father.
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 - Love of God and love are neighbor are two sides of the heavenly coin...the coin of the cross, upon which those commandments are stamped.
 - Anything we do for the true good of our neighbor is a participation in the love which God IS...for He, AS love, is the source of all love.
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 - So...sincerity in faith first...pursuing the love of God in prayer and worship—Sunday Mass, daily prayer...and the following of the moral law of charity that He has given us through scripture and the Church, which is love of neighbor.
 - So, in our day-to-day lives...in each choice for self or for the other person—in whatever we do—to follow the teaching of God is to follow what is good and right...and to advance His teaching and devotion to Him is what is truly for the good of society and for every person. That is love of God. That is love of neighbor.

Reading 1

[Ex 22:20-26](#)

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.

My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword;
then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.

"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people,
you shall not act like an extortioner toward him
by demanding interest from him.

If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge,
you shall return it to him before sunset;
for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body.
What else has he to sleep in?
If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate."

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51](#)

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.

I love you, O LORD, my strength,
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge,
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!
Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,
and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The LORD lives and blessed be my rock!
Extolled be God my savior.
You who gave great victories to your king
and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading II

[1 Thes 1:5c-10](#)

Brothers and sisters:

You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake.
And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,
receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit,
so that you became a model for all the believers
in Macedonia and in Achaia.
For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth
not only in Macedonia and in Achaia,
but in every place your faith in God has gone forth,
so that we have no need to say anything.
For they themselves openly declare about us
what sort of reception we had among you,
and how you turned to God from idols
to serve the living and true God
and to await his Son from heaven,
whom he raised from the dead,
Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

Gospel

[Mt 22:34-40](#)

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together, and one of them,
a scholar of the law tested him by asking,
"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"
He said to him,
"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.
The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."