

How to Follow the First Two Great Commandments



We are part of God’s spiritual family but this does not make us perfect or immune to our sinful nature. Our rights and responsibilities as Catholics guide us in how we express and exercise our faith in the world. Let us look at what the first two great commandments are and what they mean:

The First Two Great Commandments

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: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Our rights and responsibilities as Catholics are built on two great commandments in the Bible. Jesus Himself said that “the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” so it is important that we take them to heart so that we can understand the role that we have as God’s people. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches us to love God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

What Does it Mean to Love God?

God is many things to us, he is our father, master, savior and king. To love Him means we fully recognize and acknowledge that He knows what is best for us and that we are willing to surrender our lives completely to Him.



The best illustration for this kind of love is a child's love for his father. When we were young, we depended on our father to take care of us. We trusted our father to provide for our needs, to protect us and to guide us. We were helpless and we could not survive without our father's help so we rely on him completely.

In the same way, loving our Heavenly Father means we have full faith that He will look after us. Of course this is a lot harder to do when we have grown up to become independent adults because at this point, we feel that we no longer need anyone to help us survive. This is precisely why it is important that we establish a personal relationship with God.

We cannot fully appreciate God's power and glory if we do not actively seek Him. Making Him part of our day to day life is one way to show that we love Him. By being mindful that God is with us, we let His will inform every action, word or thought that we have.

There is nothing more important than committing ourselves fully to our relationship with God because to do this is a supreme act of humility. We recognize that our lives are not our own and we realize that everything we do will have an impact in our relationship with our Almighty Father. Hence, we would never do things that would hurt Him, in the same way that we would never do things that would hurt the people we love.

Following the second commandment is a lot easier when we completely submit ourselves to the will of God.

What Does it Mean to Love Our Neighbors?



When Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors He did not only mean the people who lived in close proximity to us. He means all of humankind and this includes both the people we know and do not know and even our enemies. This command is best explained in Matthew 5:44-47:

But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?"

If we take God's command in light of the preceding Bible verse, "love your neighbor" becomes a lot more challenging. It is easy to love the people we like but it is a completely different matter to love people we do not know, more so the people we don't like. Furthermore, we are told not to simply love our neighbors but to love them just as we love ourselves. We can only realize the seriousness of this command when we recall what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

God sent His only son, Jesus, to save us from eternal death and to redeem us from all our sins. Through His ultimate sacrifice, Jesus conferred an incredible value on our lives so we have every reason to hold ourselves in high esteem. When we love others as we love ourselves we acknowledge that they, too, have been saved by our Heavenly Father. They were given mercy and grace just as we have been given mercy and grace. So it is understandable that we must treat them with patience, compassion and respect. In other words, we must treat them in the same way that we want to be treated.