

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (9/27/2020)

Jesus today lays out the two great commandments (as he will do elsewhere, and as a young man will also do when in conversation with Him). These two very general commandments allow us to group all the other commands of the law. We know that the ten commandments can be grouped in this way. The first three refer to duties to God, the remaining seven, duties to neighbor. But in looking at this we must remember our place and the primary duties owed to God. In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus questions a lawyer about how he reads the law - the man presents these same two two commandments on equal footing. Jesus approves of the response of condensing the law into these two basic precepts. However, in the instance we hear today, the question posed to Jesus is what is the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus' presentation does not place the two precepts on equal footing as the lawyer did - he does indicate the primacy of one of them.

Jesus says: *Thou shalt love the lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind* - and then indicates: *This is the greatest and first commandment.* The second commandment: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*, follows from this one and is a mirror image of the greatest commandment. Although we as humans are so self-focused at times that we can lose sight of the great gulf that exists between our status and that of God - we must remind ourselves of this. In the Gospel, Jesus asked the Pharisees about the Christ - in a way he asks them what they think of He who is the Christ. They say he is David's son. Now in the general order of things, a father is always greater than his son - sons owe obedience and respect to their father (check out commandment #4). They place the Christ in a position as a human of lesser standing than David. Jesus asserts the deeper nature of the person of the Messiah and uses a line from the psalms to show David referring to the Christ as Lord - thus indicating that he is greater than David. Jesus Christ may have a body that descended from David, he may in one manner be called the "son of David," but make no mistake - the true Father from which Jesus comes is that Father in heaven who is above all.

In our own ways we may try to place the person of Jesus below the correct status. We may forget that he proceeds from the one true Godhead and is to be loved above all in heart, soul, and mind. We do this when in our actions we decide to place our own will over that of God,

when we place our own decisions above the precepts that Jesus has given us. And the two most summary of these precepts are played before us today. The love of God is something that we must continue to develop, but it is mirrored in the second commandment. To fail to follow this second commandment means that you have not properly understood the first. If you love the Lord your God with your whole heart and soul and mind, if you have faith in the Son who told us to do as he directs then you must follow that second commandment - or you are not a lover of God, but a rebellious child.

In the Epistle, Paul tells the Ephesians to follow the call to live involve of that Father who is above all. He explains that in doing this we must do as we have been called and act towards each other *with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity, careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* The love of neighbor as thyself is part of fulfilling the love of God. The lesser commandment is part of fulfilling the greater commandment. For no one can say they love God and hate their neighbor. We may think we can. That we can profess our love of God and perform acts to support that love to the person of God, but still lack charity for neighbor. If we do this we are saying I love you God and then disrespecting his commands and his other beloved children.

It is hard sometimes to love neighbor on the way to loving God, but this is part of the path to fulfilling the greatest commandment. Notice that the undercurrent of all of this discussion is love. Jesus chooses to frame the definitions based on love. Loving God with our whole person - aligning the core of our humanity (heart), the core of our existence (soul), and the root of our will (mind) to the mind of God. What flows from authentically doing this is another form of love - the love that loves others as we are loved by God. In this love the presence of God is made manifest, in this love the Father is glorified, and through exercise of this love the Father's will is accomplished. Two simple commandments, but much is included. Let us pray to be given the grace through this sacrament today to enter more deeply in that love that is meant to be shared to all our neighbors, and which draws us to the source of all love - our eternal Father in Heaven.