

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

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."

Mt 22:34-40

Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?

What a strange question. Saint Matthew points out that the scholar of the law was testing Jesus. The question was supposed to show which way Jesus is leaning in the complicated and treacherous world of Jerusalem politics of the first century.

Although the scholar was not really asking for advice, the question still stands because, as it often happens in encounters with Jesus, it becomes a mirror of our own faith. When I attempt to answer this question, which commandment is the greatest, my convictions about the nature of God and my attitude toward Him reveal themselves. It doesn't stop there, however. I need to go deeper, to the very core of my identity and ask an even more difficult question: What do I really care about?

If we get over the Pharisaic treachery and address the question to ourselves, we would have to reflect on what is important to us. If my dearest friends were dying of starvation, what would be the last thing I sell to feed them? If I had one last phone call right now, before a lifelong travel in space, who would I call? Why this person and not another? If the only way to protect my loved ones were to renounce my convictions, which conviction would be the last to go? Which truth, which belief would I defend to the last breath? Would there be any one more important than all the people and things in my life?

How about success? When finally I move out of my mom's basement and put the final touches on the three-garage-mansion with an infinity pool, will I still have time to call her? Do I still have to be nice to her, even in my busy and demanding life? When I

become the CEO of the World, Inc. and start solving the problems of millions, making them happy and rich, do I still have to listen to my daughter's naive longings for happiness? When my security in life is so certain that I don't have to work and both presidential candidates compete for my support and advice, do I still have to spend time kneeling before God?

The answer offered by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew shocks by its profound simplicity. The quote from the Old Testament that he uses suggests absolute love and absolute obedience to God as the foundation of everything. The precision of His answer is breathtaking. It proposes that absolute love and absolute obedience to God is the only way to avoid "rotten" compromises of life, to avoid getting lost in the world of competing "good choices."

The world is telling us that nobody can be trusted, that everybody is hiding something, that "only a friend can betray you." The world is telling us that we can only trust ourselves, and even then, only within the limits of caution and with great suspicion. The world wants us to believe that everything that is holy somehow must get dirty in the encounter with "real life."

Jesus proposes the way out of the dark and twisted corridors of human conscience, out of situations that we create for ourselves and others and that crush us by their magnitude and brutality. We are not condemned to never-ending compromise with so-called "reality." We are not forced to the ultimate betrayal of ideals and things we hold holy.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. In every situation, in every time. No matter how hopeless things seem, no matter how much you thought you ashamed yourself.

Love the Lord with all your heart and all your mind, with everything that is left in you. Only then my neighbor is not my enemy anymore. Only then I can see myself in him: weak, used, and bleeding, but still clinging to the only thing that truly matters.

Love the Lord with all your heart and all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. It is true: the whole law and the prophets, all societies and systems, all times and situations, one way or another, depend on how much I agree and live by the answer that Jesus gave to the scholar of the law.