

The Greatest Command

Thirty-five years ago, I was a graduate student at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Thirty-five years ago, that city and our entire nation was gripped by a health emergency.

A new virus called HIV was claiming the lives of thousands.

Because my studies involved working in a hospital with the sick and dying, my life was upended by this new, mysterious deadly virus.

On Saturday mornings I'd gather with other care-givers in a church basement in an attempt to get our minds around what we were dealing with. A young doctor from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) helped us understand the biology of this scourge. He dispelled myths and misinformation at a time when so many of the sick and dying were being treated like lepers.

Above all he taught *me* to be level-headed and compassionate.

That young doctor's name was Anthony. Anthony Fauci.

I was thinking back to those Saturday mornings when I re-read this Sunday's gospel (Matthew 22: 34-40).

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul... You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus tells his students that the love of God and neighbor are the greatest commandments and that the two are inseparable.

To be clear, the kind of *love* that Jesus invites us to live isn't about "warm-fuzzies" or simple polite positive regard toward others. This is not the stuff of teddy-bears, fairy tales or romantic season finales on *The Bachelorette*.

This love is action. This love gets to work in the midst of formidable challenges. This love makes great sacrifices.

Our love of neighbor "proves" our love of God. By loving our neighbor in need, we honor the God who created us all.

Every one of us has been blessed in life with people who have taught us the meaning of these commands.

Some on the list may have been saints and heroes who inspired us. Others may have been parents, grandparents, teachers, friends or even strangers who seemed to show up in life out of nowhere.

You have your list. I have mine. It may be long. It may be short.

Whatever the case, that list is sacred. That list is a starting point for moving forward.

Take that list. Apply everything you learned: the courage, the faith, the compassion, the perseverance. Apply it to today. Connect it to 2020.

If we do that, we will have lived the great commandments.

And God's will, *will* be done.

Fr. Steven Labaire