

The first and greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Dt 6:5). In combination with this command, the Book of Deuteronomy promises that God will respond with great favor to those who love God so generously. “I will give the seasonal rain to your land, the early rain and the late rain, that you may have your grain, wine and oil to gather in; and I will bring forth grass in your fields for your animals. Thus you may eat and be satisfied” (11:14-15). You might be lured into a false sense of prosperity thinking if I just do the right thing now, I will receive a fitting and quick reward in this life.

There are many just people who love the Lord deeply and do not seem to find material profit from it nor should they expect to. We need to set our sights much higher than an immediate payback. The true land of milk and honey is not some golden spot on this earth but rather the eternal reward in the life to come.

Jesus offers the best example of how to love God. His love for his Father and for us was so great that he chose the poverty of humanity as one way to demonstrate how we are to love. Jesus “did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Ph 2:6-9).

The second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” The Book of Leviticus situates this commandment in the context of neighbors from one’s own tribe. “Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18). Saint Paul offers a broader interpretation, “‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom 3:9).

Jesus takes this same commandment and helps us to understand that our neighbor is more than one of our own. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite do not reach out to help one of their own who has been beaten by robbers. Only the foreigner, the Samaritan, approaches the victim and then goes out of his way to nurse him back to good health.

In one sense Jesus is the Good Samaritan. He saw suffering humanity bruised and bloodied by sin. He became human in order to reach out to us. Both his miracles and his teaching are oil to heal and bandage wounds.

At stories end, “he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back’ (Lk 10:35). Jesus instructed his apostles, and he instructs us to carry on his mission. We are to love our neighbor and care for them. In the end Jesus comeback will repay us for our kindness. The true land of milk and honey is not some golden spot on this earth but rather the promise of an eternal reward in the life to come.