



Blessed Sacrament Parish
Homily by Father Chris Comerford
November 4, 2018 Thirtyfirst Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Psalm 18:2-4, 51

Reading II Hebrews 7:23-28

Gospel Mark 12:28-34

Homily

If you are like me you want to find out the things that are most critical—a line that you can't cross. You can go so far and that's it. We often want to go that way with the law with the things that we can do. We thought that was happening when the Scribe in the Scripture today challenged Jesus about the first of all commandments, the most important commandment of all. And we see Jesus not getting tripped up, and it really isn't a trick as many of the others had been. Before, in the Jewish religion, there had been only one answer, and Jesus gives it.

"Love the Lord, Your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and all your strength," Deuteronomy Chapter Six. You heard it in the first reading. And is the great shema to the Jewish people. It is interesting to think of this as the Jewish law of God as we think of the tragedy that happened at the synagogue in Pittsburgh. We pray for those who lost their lives in this horrible tragedy. One woman, who had survived the holocaust, was killed in her own place of worship. Horrible. So do we do think of our Jewish brothers and sisters who taught us, "Put God first, the highest of all things."

But Jesus doesn't stop there, he gives us a second commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." That was from Leviticus, and it was also part of all Jewish teaching. It wasn't new. It was a great reminder that these are the most important things and he even links them together. It is good for us to hear that because so often we think of the Ten Commandments. So where are the ten? There are at least two. The first three of the ten commandments of God, the next seven are about "Love you neighbor." It is clearly reflected in these teachings. He summed it up. So it is good to think of this when you can break it down in parts. For the Jewish people they had 613 commandments they were called to follow. They just kept expanding and expanding them. But all the commandments can all be narrowed down to these two.

It is simple. It is pretty basic. Or is it? What is it? I like to look at the "Thou shalt nots." Those are pretty clear. Don't do this. Don't do that. But you will notice in the two commandments of Jesus there are no "Thou shalt nots." Jesus's two commandments are just calling us and telling us what to do. And if you really look at it, it is much more difficult. There are no exceptions. No exceptions? We are to "Love the Lord, Your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and all your strength." Unless there is something else you really want to do this weekend? Well, that's not in there, is it?

Love your neighbor unless they really made you mad. Oh, that's not in there either. There aren't any exceptions. And that challenges us deeply in how we can grow in this way.

I had someone come to confession and say, "Father, I can't think of any sins that I have committed." I wish I had that problem. "OK, then," I said to him, "How are you doing in these areas? Are you putting God first? And do you really love your neighbor as yourself?" Most of us love ourselves very much. We often put ourselves at the center of the universe and the center of our families. And so it is a challenge to love others in the same way.

It is not too bad when people love us back. That's pretty easy. But our neighbor beyond that is not just our family, not just the people that live next door, not just the people sitting around with us today. Jesus has taught us that it is often the ones who challenge us, and that is where it gets difficult. That is when it really is a challenge, and we need to turn to God for his help. Some people are not very comfortable with this. It's tough. But it is the difficult neighbors in our lives we need to focus on.

We think of people who are national figures who are sometimes difficult to love. Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, other major figures—you have to love them. They are your neighbors. You don't really have to like them, but you have to love them—your former wife, your former husband, maybe your child's former wife or husband. Umm. The boss who treated you unfairly. I know you are thinking, "OK, Father. You are going too far with this." Most of us can think of people who are a struggle to love. But that is what we are called to do. We are called to reach out, and the way to start is to pray for them. Jesus told us, "Pray for your enemies." Someone you really struggle with is your enemy. Pray for them. Pray that you can love them.

The other part is to put God first in everything. Doing that always makes things better. "I don't have time," we think. "I don't have time for God. I don't have time to pray. I don't have time to go to Mass. I don't have time to do all these things." But for me, I find that the busier I am the more I need to pray, the more I need to worship God, the more I need to turn to Him. When I do that it seems like I have a lot more time. These two commandments are the source and summit of our Christian life—really the way we are called to live. The Scribe gets it and says, "Jesus, what you have said is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices." And that was a big statement. That would be like our saying, "It's more important to do this than go to Mass." You have to do both. This is the way we are called to live.

The challenge is to understand this, and when we do, that is how we can be close to the Kingdom of God. How often do we put God first? Or, what things am I putting above God? Do I love those who are really tough to love, and am I working on that in some way? Let's pray to take this to heart. We need God's grace to do this. We need to follow the example that Jesus has set for us. Let's open our hearts to grow in love of God, and in love of our neighbor.

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