

30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "A"

October 29, 2017

Readings: Exodus 22: 20-26; 1 Thess 1:5-10; Matthew 22:34-40

Perhaps since the Late Show's Top Ten lists first appeared in 1982, or U.S. News and World Report published its first college and university rankings in 1983, we Americans appear obsessed with producing lists and rankings of sports teams, restaurants, colleges and Universities, to name but a few. Top ten lists are given about every conceivable category.

Perhaps this is why it may strike the modern mindset as quite peculiar to hear a question, "Which commandment is the greatest?" It seems so out of character? It is even more surprising given the answer—I suspect we are automatically thinking in terms of the 10 commandments—yet the answer given is not one of the Ten.

In actuality, the question is placed in terms of the rabbinical understanding of the Law. Here, Jesus is actually quoting from two different sources of the Jewish Law: (a) Deuteronomy 6:5, and (b) Leviticus 19:18.

The Deuteronomy passage about loving God first and foremost occupied center stage in the Jewish Law, but the second part about loving one's neighbor as oneself was not as well known. Jesus essentially elevated this lighter commandment about one's neighbor into the centrality of the Gospel message. These two root commandments were precisely the ones the Pharisees keep breaking.

Jesus is teaching that truly loving God demands the love of neighbor. He linked the two inexorably, and they have been so seen ever since. Jesus tops it off by saying that the entirety of the law and the prophets depends on these two commandments—literally, it means that they 'hang' on these two commandments.

Jesus both simplifies the faith, as well as challenges us to more. He simplifies it by paring it down to its very basics. This is not to imply that other teachings and doctrines are insignificant. Of course, they are significant. Yet, to live the fullness of our faith is extremely challenging, because it means loving our neighbor as ourselves.

If we are brutally honest, we too often tend to think about ourselves, pray for ourselves and look out for ourselves. Jesus challenges us to do the same for one another.

When author Malcolm Muggeridge spent time with Mother Teresa, he asked her to suggest a title. She demurred, but he insisted. After a moment, she said, "Something Beautiful for God," explaining: "Every day on awaking, my desire and my enthusiasm is this: Today I must do something beautiful for God...What is there that I can do better for God than to console the distressed! Wipe away the tears of those who weep, be a refuge to the abandoned, pour love into the hearts of the unloved." How can we make her words into ours? We all have a long way to go.

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we remain saddened by the divisions among Christians, and seek greater cooperation and unity, even while remaining committed to honest and truthful discussion on area of divergence.

Yes, doctrine is important, our Catholic faith is rich in tradition and teaching, in our sacramental and moral theology. Yet, Jesus challenges us to keep the broader perspective in mind in our daily lives. Every Christian can equally take this Gospel challenge to heart today- it is equally difficult for all Christians.

As we drive on the crowded roads, parking lots at stores, at work, in a crowded lunchroom at school-ask yourself if you are indeed loving God

with all that you have. Ask yourself if you have done something beautiful for God today, a good deed, an act of kindness or virtue. Ask if you are being patient with the driver in front of you on the road.

Take the words of this simple Gospel to heart—it is much more difficult than it sounds! That is why it truly is the greatest of all the commandments!