

Nov 3rd, 2024

The Greatest Commandment: [Mk 12:28b-34](#)

For readings ... see [here](#).

We just heard how Jesus clarifies commandments ... Why? ... there were 613 laws or commandments that the Jews had ... from the Torah ... the first 5 books of the bible.

This year in our Family Faith Formation program, the main focus is the commandments and our 3rd class covered "The Greatest Commandment" that we just heard Jesus state. I would encourage families that aren't already attending to join our program and use the materials father has produced ... that are also available on our website today I use parts of class 3 ... as it ties in directly with the first reading and the Gospel.

We just heard the scribe's question: "**Which is the first of all the commandments?**" Then Jesus replied, "**The first is this: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall LOVE your neighbor as yourself.***"

OK ... we get it ... we need to love God first and love our neighbor as ourselves. Simple? Well, not really because we naturally start coming up with questions ...

How do I love God? What exactly is love here ... that Jesus is talking about. And, how do I love God and my neighbor ...?

From Pope Benedict's Encyclical, [Deus Caritas Est](#) or *God is Love*, we get a beautiful and clear description of what the word love really means ... here. I encourage all of you to at least read the first part. I have a link to the pope's document in the homily that I will post. The world uses love mostly to mean the physical attraction between a man and woman ... the Greek word, *eros* or erotic love. The pope and the new testament are referring primarily to *agape* or sacrificial love ... that we see when we look at Jesus hanging on the cross ... that good parents engage in when having and raising children.

In the world and in our faith, we have many uses of the word love. How can we come to understand what Jesus meant in today's Gospel? We could spend hours delving into love.

Let's start with some basics father explained in our 3rd class on what love is. There are basically 3 levels of love:

1. *the attraction to what is good*— loving things.
2. willing or wanting the good for another – loving people.
3. willing or wanting what God wants – loving God.

With level 1 - love of things: We might say, I love pizza ... or anchovies ... I love ice cream or I love my dog. We love things in God's creation that we deem to be very good and helpful in our lives. We can and do possess, buy, sell, and use ... these things in life. So level 1 is *the attraction to what is good*.

With level 2 - loving people: we are drawn to people that are good or in need and repelled by people that turned to evil. We can't treat people like things ... we can't use, buy, possess, or sell people. People need to be treated with dignity. We are drawn to people but must respect human dignity ... so love is refined to *willing the good of the other*. We are happy when they are happy and sad when they are sad. A key here is "not using" ... when using a person we treat them like a thing and fail to respect their dignity.

With this level of love, our will becomes ... to seek their good ... so we sacrifice for them; parents do this ... to provide ... to discipline ... Jesus did this for us, too. When two people are truly in love ... they give to the other ... make sacrifices ... Another example is when we see people in need and we help them which requires a sacrifice, too.

Once again, level 2 or interpersonal love is *willing the good of the other* which includes helping those in need.

Now we turn to level 3 "love of God" ... God has all things ... we can't will the good of God ... He already has it all and so has no needs. We are attracted to God ... because God is all good. To love God means we want what God wants for us ... He wants our salvation. We love God by uniting our actions with his Will.

God wants our love (which is to do what He wants). Now, God doesn't want our love because of the good he has given us ... but because of who He is. We can love because of the

good God has done (creating us with the ability to love), but God wants to be loved because of who he is ... THE ALMIGHTY ... we want this too ... to be loved for who we are.

So level 3 love is basically to do what God wants and we learn this through what God has revealed and the Church Jesus established ... and discernment with others.

Now, we can't love God or our neighbor or things, if we don't know them. Make sense? If we don't taste the ice cream first, we can't love it ... With people, we can't love them until we get to really know them. And with God, we also need to learn what God wants, before we can love Him.

Now, let me just mention one thing some are confused by ... that is knowledge vs wisdom. We can know many things ... and learn many things and thereby obtain knowledge. But wisdom, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is the **proper use** of knowledge. We can't love God without knowing what God wants. And we can't use the gift of Wisdom that we receive through the sacraments ... unless we work at it ... learning what God wants first and then acting on it.

We can also refuse to believe or accept or follow what we know ... our knowledge. For example, we can ignore the instructions from our doctor. We can knowingly eat things that we know will hurt us and avoid things that are good for us. So, just because we have knowledge doesn't mean we are wise. To love God and neighbor, we need to decide to love and wisely choose to do what we should.

I love that line from the movie, *Forrest Gump* ... where Forrest, who was intellectually challenged, kept saying when people called him stupid ... "*my momma used to say, stupid is as stupid does.*" It isn't so much what we know, but what we do or don't do with the knowledge we have obtained. There are some very smart people who don't love correctly and who sadly ... reject God.

So the bottom line is, we must learn what God wants from each of us and then wisely choose to follow Him. That is the first and greatest commandment and then we will naturally love our neighbor, too.