

31B The Stewardship of Love

In today's Gospel we hear a scribe, a writer of the law pose a question to Jesus of which he most likely already knew the answer. What is the greatest commandment he asks? Jesus responds by quoting from a book of the law, from chapter 6 of the book of Deuteronomy which is the book from which our first reading was taken today.

But without any prompting he quickly adds a second commandment from another Jewish Law book, the Book of Leviticus. He is the first to bring together these two commandments the love of God and the love of neighbor.

This first and greatest of the commandments would have been very familiar to the Scribe and to all faithful Jews. It is the prayer known as the "Shema" which means "listen" or "hear". The faithful Jew prays this Jewish declaration of faith at least twice a day, morning and before bedtime.

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. As a priest, I like all priests are very familiar with this prayer. We pray with it every Saturday night as part of the Divine Office before we go to bed.

It is so important for the faithful Jew that at the end of the Prayer Moses gives the following instruction: "Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of the at home and abroad whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them on your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and your gates."

What's the moral imperative here? The Lord our God is the Lord alone”
To be loved with every ounce of our being. With all our Heart, with
understanding and with all our strength.

In adding the commandment from the book of Leviticus, Jesus says we
must love God and our neighbor. One is not sufficient without the
other. We can't privatize our faith such that it becomes just me and
God. Christ gave us his church because he wanted us to live and work
together in community of believers.

On the other hand, we can't just focus on caring for our neighbor. We
must also develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. This comes through
prayer and worship especially the Mass where we encounter Jesus in
both Word and Sacrament.

That relationship is strengthened through our works of charity which
give us the opportunity to both represent and encounter Jesus when
we reach out to the most vulnerable.

From these works we establish what I would describe as the
stewardship of love. God who is love, is the source of all that we have
and are. Our loving response of his command to love God and neighbor
is to use the gifts that he has given us for carrying out that command as
he intends, for his purposes. When we do that we are being good
stewards of His love.

Each year at this time we are giving the opportunity to renew or make a
first-time commitment to stewardship for our parish. It is a
responsibility that is expected to be shared by all who worship here.
For the past two weeks, we have been featuring this call to stewardship
in weekly bulletin

This weekend one of your fellow parishioners will speak to you of their personal stewardship experience, to encourage you and me, as we prepare to make our annual commitment from our treasure, for the work that God has for us to do in this parish and beyond.

From this comes our gospel challenge for the week

In the spirit of the Shema, prayerfully listen, to how God is calling you to participate in the stewardship of love that God seeks to accomplish in and through our parish in the coming year. Ask in prayer for the grace to answer that call.

“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.”