

Homily-TheGreatestCommandments

There are 613 commandments in the Jewish Law. In order to most fully live out the Law people discussed which commandments were most important in the Law. In today's Gospel a scholar of the Law uses this interest in order to trick Jesus. The scholar asks Jesus which commandment in the Law is the greatest. Jesus names two: the love of God (Deut 6:4-5) and love of neighbor (Lev 19:18).

Love of God

Jesus indicates that the most important commandment in the Law is to love God with our whole person.

We are to know that God loves us as we are. We often turn away from God but God is always there for us. The love that we are to share with God is similar to the love that an older couple has for one another. Think about a couple who has been married for 40 to 50 years and spend time simply enjoying the company of the other. They know one another completely and feel safe in one another's presence. We are to love God in the same way. We are to know that God completely loves us. We are to give thanks that God has loved us in the past and will continue to love us into the future.

Love of neighbor

Jesus says that not only are we to love God but that we are to love one another as we love ourselves. Just as we hold ourselves in esteem and care for ourselves we are to love our neighbor. The love for our neighbor is greater than just love for our friends and family members. In the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus teaches us who our neighbor is. Our neighbor is not merely our countrymen but all people including our enemies. In the parable of the Good Samaritan a Samaritan takes care of a Jew. The Samaritan would have been a mortal enemy of the Jew. Jesus shows us that all are our neighbor and that we have a responsibility to actively care for each of our neighbors.

The first reading shows us that just as God has a special love for the powerless we are to as well. The Ancient New East was a patriarchal society. Widows were powerless as they had no husband and orphans were powerless as they had no father. The Israelites were to care for widows and orphans. In a tribal society aliens were powerless as they did not have family ties. God's People were to care for aliens as they had once been aliens themselves. We are to see the powerless and poor as our neighbor.

God Loves Us

I especially like the last line of this reading, "If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate (Exodus 22:26)." This verse shows that God loves the poor and powerless. The verse reminds us that God hears us when we suffer. In the Gospel we are commanded to love God and to love our neighbor. The first reading reminds us that God is compassionate and in that compassion He loves us very much. In our lives we experience the love of God in various ways. One of those ways is through the sacraments. This is especially true of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Each year our parish celebrates the Anointing of the Sick Within Mass. This celebration allows us to experience the healing love of God through this sacrament. I believe that this is a way of experiencing God's love but it also speaks of who we are called to be. The Anointing of the Sick reminds us that we are to be a healing presence among the people in our lives.

Soon I will invite parishioners forward to be anointed. If you do not come forward to be anointed I ask that you pray for those who are anointed. I ask as well that we all pray for the parishioners who are not able to attend Mass as a result of their poor health. Some of our parishioners are in the hospital and others are home bound. Please keep all of these parishioners in your prayers.

Who is invited to come forward to receive this sacrament? You may come forward to be anointed if you are preparing for surgery or have recently had surgery. You may come forward if you have health issues resulting from your age. If you have a serious illness or an illness which might become serious you are invited to come forward. If you have serious emotional illness you may be anointed and children who are at least seven years old and who are seriously ill may come forward to be anointed.

I invite those who are seriously ill to come forward to be anointed.