

St Pius-St Anthony 30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Jesus shows up for the quiz today! Back in my high school Latin class, we had daily assignments memorizing vocabulary. Mr Duffy told us in the beginning of the year that we were subject to quizzes any day. Some days we had them, some days we didn't. But the sign (telltale signal) we were having one that day was that he would stand at the podium in front of room, and while taking attendance, and he would begin tearing a regular sheet of paper into fourths. Those were our answer sheets. We would scramble to look one last time at the chapter glossary that week. But that was the pop-quiz. It sounds like that is what is happening to Jesus today. But haven't we noticed that He has been getting popped a lot recently as we hear in the first line, "When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together and one of them, a scholar of the law, ..." (Matt 22:34-35). Already, the Sadducees had just tested him over the concept of resurrection (22:23-33)—About if & where it could be found in their scriptures. And then as we heard last week, the Pharisees and Herodians had challenged him about paying Caesar's tax or not (22:15-23), and earlier in chapter 21 Jesus had been confronted by the whole group-chief priests Elders-Pharisees & Sadducees about his 'authority'-his credentials as teacher. They demanded that He justify himself (To prove what great teacher trained him or which rabbinic school he attended)-trying to show Him out-put Him down in front of the people. But Jesus calmly handled that condescending question by just asking them straight, "By whose authority do you say, John Baptist taught?" (Matt 21:25-27). They responded 'We don't know' to save face', though John, like Jesus appeared without elite credentials (John was hugely influential conversion agent among the same people in that crowd!). So today here is one more try-test quiz for the Pharisees with their top gun litigator-this 'scholar'. He asks Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" This sounds simple enough. We might ask what is testing or tricky about that? But it the purpose behind the question. That is the problem. It is a minimizing question. It is the type like 'What is the least I have to do here to get by?' I may use classroom examples a lot but this is like when teachers give a composition assignment and the kids immediately ask, "Does it have to be in cursive?" (*Now isn't that something? our test-what is cursive-that is dated isn't it?- I have to share this; recently a child wrote me a card saying he was learning to write cursive in school- and I thought it would be great to write back to him a whole letter in cursive myself-it was a challenge to me-whole letter-especially the capitals Z or Q-some are tough to get where you need to get on paper-keep the pen moving*). Or how about they ask 'Does spelling count?' or 'How many words does it have to be?' But this doesn't just happen with children we can do this as adults with our jobs, when a worker thinks 'I do least I can, to still collect a check' or 'seeing water pour out on the hall floor (that someone can fall on) and we say, 'that is not my job description'. This can be

anybody, priests too. Have you ever heard the joke about 'Our Sunday Visitor'-no, no the newspaper, the actual priest that only time parishioners see work-Sunday in an out. I hope not. But this question of the Pharisee Scholar, it tempts Jesus to give one great command that then can be used to minimize/ignore all the others or the harder ones to follow (like if only I do the big one, then the rest let go). Jesus wants to **challenge** that mentality of 'getting by with the least effort possible. Jesus thinks the opposite of that. The greatest commandment is that all of them get followed. For example, to answer expected response to the scholar's question would be to just quote the first command God ever gave to Moses. Surely that first one God himself gave, is the greatest. What is that? God says, "I am the lord your God, there is no other" Ex 20:2-3 So if there is no other, then we give this one God our all---that is love Him with all your heart, mind, body soul. (Found in Deut 6:5 "Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.) But Jesus knows that especially the Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, chief priest, they were all good at saying 'I believe in God', 'I love God'. But that was all. They said it. Period. Didn't really do anything to show it. Anyone can say that, and Jesus knew they were failing the test of showing their love of God and truly practicing a faith that manifests fruits of loving service and care for other people with actions. They promoted religion that promoted themselves authorities with official titles consuming the Temple's mandatory proceeds (temple taxes, obligatory sacrifices, forced offerings). So Jesus, answers with the First commandment but He doesn't stop there. He adds "**The second is like it:** You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" (Matt 22:39-40). That means I don't just get by saying 'I love God'. No, I have to demonstrate it. I show my love of God in how I take care of other people. Love of God is shown in my concern for other people. I have only one God; no others gods, but **God Himself gives me other responsibilities** such as helping care for the other children of God. I show my love of Him by respecting who else He has made here around me. And I bet we can guess pretty accurately how the Pharisees, priests & elders were scoring in that class.

So Jesus with His answer, is more concerned not about satisfying scholar's community of legal opinions over technicalities of the law, Jesus was more concerned about the 'heart-set' (not mindset) of the faithful follower of the law. Again, the Pharisees wanted one commandment; they would do that one and ignore the rest: get by with the least responsibility by just punching in, punching out on the God clock. I think of them like the child that complained one Sunday as family was getting ready to go to mass, "Mom do we gotta go to church today!" And she said, "Oh no! You are looking at this all wrong. No, we don't gotta go to church; We GET TO go to church." Now that is loving God. And the same this mom could say to the boy, about loving his brother, making his brother's bed, carrying his brother's books to school. He may say, "Do I gotta help him?" and she can say, "Son, be thankful, you have got a brother and that you get to help him." That

is family, and the family of God that Jesus is teaching us about today. He says, "The first and greatest commandment is 'Love the lord your God with all your heart, minds & strength, and the second is like it, "love your neighbor as yourself." Loving God, and loving God in your neighbor.