

St Pius-St Anthony 31st Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

My brother tells a great story of once when he had volunteered as a counselor at a summer camp for the physically/mentally handicapped, (keep in mind volunteers are all students/kids in middle/high school), but it is still a great summer Christian experience. During the orientation days, the leaders sat them through a lot of primer courses (map of the campgrounds, the buildings' names, fire & storm drill stuff, typical group maintenance & pep talks, and a basic overview of medical, first aid stuff: which is where this story gets good. He was telling me about their beginner's first aid issues like the ABC's of triage. Test cases & questions were presented to them, like what is universal sign of choking? But this was the great case: They were asked, 'A Camper collapses in the activity hall, & you walk up to them, suspecting that they are not breathing, what do you do? Someone said "Do a tracheotomy!" The instructor came back, "Oh, No, No, No, No, Never do that-you have been watching too much TV. Everybody listen, no one here does a tracheotomy, never-no knife blade gets near a camper!"

I imagine every field, occupation or job has a couple of standard questions you can initially ask to quickly gauge whether someone has a sense of what they are doing or not (how much experience they have in job). A little test question. For example, if I'm thinking of a mechanic, I might ask him/her, 'My truck has been missing lately, what's the most likeliest couple of possible problems-where might you start?' Experienced mechanics will have a list of parts to check 1st and things to rule out. Well I find this is what the scribe is up to asking Jesus this question today. He is checking, "Does Jesus know what he is talking about?" So, he throws a standard rabbinic question at Jesus: "Which is the greatest commandment?" Jesus being the reader of hearts that He is, He knows what the scribe is after-that He is sizing him up. By asking, "What is greatest command?", the scribe is wanting to get to the most central part of practicing faith. But we have to think for a minute, how funny the question is on one level? I find that to ask, 'What is the greatest law God gave us?', that sounds a lot like asking a parent, "Who is your favorite child?" Well, we all know, they all are; each child is the most important, there is no one favorite. So with God's commands, is there one and only one I have to follow? This accounts for Jesus giving the two (he was asked for ONE), he is giving a summary of the law.

Here, Jesus is breaking it down and distilling all the commandments into two principles: Love God, & Love your neighbor. If you are truly observing these two, then you don't break any of the others. Or as a friend reminded me, saying, "Look at that order: love 1) God, and love your 2) neighbor as 3) yourself." Love/serve God first, then love/serve your neighbor next and last of all serve yourself. God, neighbor and Self-Good order to follow!

Jesus is saying that we cannot truly love God without showing that love in how we treat/take care of or interact with other human beings. He reveals that

the foundation of our care and love of other human beings is grounded in our knowing that they were created by God. We respect God by taking care of what He made. The reason we love & serve neighbor is because God made them and us together. If I mistreat them, I am disrespecting God. He is revealing an inner unity between these two commands. We can't observe one truly without the other.

Maybe it is hard for us to imagine (if so, you are good!), but apparently some people would set these two commandments against each other. The might tell another person, "I love God, but I don't care about you", as though by loving God, it justifies them neglecting any care for another human being. (They self-righteously say, "I am doing this for God, get out of my way!" without them seeing that they are walking over top of another person.) Jesus is teaching that we can't say 'we love God' while we hurt what he has made. Or just as misguidedly, someone may claim to love their neighbor, while rejecting God. Maybe they say, "I love you and don't care about God." Well, that doesn't make sense. Where did I get my love; who made me? What came before and will be behind me? So, Jesus says, these two great commands hold together. Love of God & Love of Neighbor

It is not just here in this bible passage, that Jesus taught this principle of the unity/identity of loving God and loving neighbor (that they are flip sides of the same coin). I find the same point being made by Him, when he shared with us the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46. The people ask, "When did we feed you Jesus-God, when did we welcome you or visit you? And the response comes back to them, "When you did it for the least of **your brother/sisters**, you did it **to me!**" When you loved your neighbor, you loved me. We find the same teaching again, in the last lesson that Jesus gave Peter before ascending on to heavenly glory. In the final chapter of John's gospel, John 21:15-17, Jesus asked Peter three times, if he loved him, and three times Peter professed that he loved Jesus. And after each response of Peter, Jesus redirected Peter to show his love of God by 'feeding/tending/feeding (3x)' His sheep. As if, Jesus was saying, "You love me Peter; then show me by loving my sheep". God is saying to us, "Show your love of me by how you care for what I created in my image-your sister or brother. And we do exactly that when we love our neighbor. (Also, I like to refer to how the letters of John and James in the Bible are both clear too, in reinforcing that we cannot claim to be loving God while neglecting or hurting another human being- John strongly says we are 'lying' when we tell God we love him, but neglect a neighbor in 1 John 4:20, and James 2:15-16 says that if we claim 'faith in God' but deny a needy brother help then our faith is dead-it is nothing.)

So, what do we do? I like how some people say about these commands, that 'to love God, oh that part is easy-it is my neighbor that makes life hard'. Yes, that is Jesus' point. He asks us to 'show our love of Him by loving others.' God says to me, "Love what I made, especially love what I made in my image (Gen 1:27). Love my image in other people. You want to love me, then Love me in them."