

St Pius & St Anthony 31st Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

Like a good chef, reducing a sauce, or creating extract or essence, Jesus gives an awesome summary of the all the law of God, the long list of commands in the gospel that we just heard. He breaks it down to two: Love God with all that you have AND he conditions it with a second, love neighbor as self (*Interestingly, the scribe who initiates this little legal commentary, when scribes are normally a hostile group to Jesus, this one commends (Mk 12:32) Jesus' answer - is it because of Jesus' hedge or caveat of that second command? A Scribe certainly knows a thing or two about stipulating conditions – fine print terms!*) Jesus implies that we can't do one without the other. Loving God means loving what God made in His image (all other human beings), and to truly respect and hold dear our neighbor is, honoring God. I think this double command of Jesus is operative/at work all the time when, children go to their parents and express their love (I love you Dad, love you Mom), and their wise parents broaden that expression of love to include the child's siblings –“You love me, then plllllease, for the love of me, get along better with your brother or sister--Love me in him/her, or love him/ her because of me”. It is a fulfilling redirection. The parent is diverting love given to him/her, diverting it toward the other children.

Another approach to seeing what Jesus is accomplishing with this double command answer, is that He is linking integrally how we relate to God and how we relate to each other – how I interact with others is a function of my relationship to God. So, I claim to 'love God'. Okay, that's sooo easy. Just say it and you are done. How easy it is, to love a disembodied spirit? And think of our obvious invested self-interest in loving God Almighty--He who wields everything over you--talk about perpetual suspicions of ulterior motives. Everybody loves God, right? Easy said! But isn't that like loving a baby infant? Everybody loves a baby infant but the deeper more heartfelt love comes in loving that infant through all of the 'terrible twos', (or for me was it 'teens') up through the 'tempestuous twenties' (*every decade is a challenge!*) We might ask, “When does the lovely baby honeymoon end?-I guess whenever we kids start talking back, or crying back for infants, and that is when the true love of the child kicks in. So similarly, to say 'I love God', the true expression of that love kicks in when I fully show my care and concern for my neighbor who God created in His image, God gave me that neighbor as a sign of His presence.

Or another approach to understanding Jesus' purpose, doubling the great command for us, is demonstrated I think with this experience from my youth. I mentioned last Sunday about us kids making up our own games, creating our own toys. Well, one afternoon when we neighborhood kids were bored, someone got the idea to have a wagon race. But we only had one wagon between us. So, we

came up with the idea to construct a 'wagon obstacle course' and do time trials – or who could just complete it without crashing.

Someone would sit in the wagon, (classic metal red wagon (Radio Flyer-Murray) with tongue handle bar that you used to pull it, but it could be reared back like a hinge, where the person sitting in the wagon could use it to try steering the front wheels too. Pushing the wagon, got up the most speed. So we put together an obstacle course, pushing the wagon around trash cans like traffic cones on the concrete patio and sidewalk, then off into the yard, trying a little ramp here or brush sticks to run over -anything for difficulty. But the real danger came up once, when I neighbor kid thought to push out the rear of the wagon to overpower the driver into a different direction. And he routed the wagon through, end to end, our metal pipe, swing set frame (no swing seat in it, but the metal A, has that supportive cross bar, half way up it, so when the wagon rider (brother) saw the bar coming at him (like a classic clothesline play-decking him at the neck) driver) he let go the wagon handle to duck forward or side. It fell forward as a puncturing ram spike which it was good at, because the wagon (no hands) ran right into and through our neighbor's garage wall. So, much so that when we extracted the handle it brought tar paper and insulation out with it. Now what? Whose fault was that? You could hear, "I didn't do it", "You were pushing", "No you were driving", or "You all watched it and didn't do anything to stop it" Well, we were all complicit. So we hid the wagon in our own garage and waited it out. To make long story short, when Dad came home from work, we 'fessed up', explaining to him the whole 'accident'. Keep in mind that this was the 'easy' part. Because, what did Dad do? Here was the hard part. He directed us to go to our neighbor. He said, 'As soon as Denny (our neighbor) gets home, you are going to him and telling the story and offering to work fixing it.' Oh noooooo, we had to face and express this all to our neighbor. That was the hard part – We matured five years, through the stress of waiting and walking the 'green mile' over the yard to meet his car when he pulled in the driveway!

But my point in this story is that my dad redirected us to our neighbor. That is what really counted. Demonstrating our true contrition meant facing our neighbor, asking his forgiveness. (It was easy with Dad, but like Jesus turning we humans toward each other, Dad redirected us to go visit with our neighbor to work it out. Again, with Jesus' double command, he is saying, it is easy to claim to 'love God' but the real love of God is shown in how I love 'the least of His' (I am thinking here of Jesus' parable of sheep and goats that communicates the same message: when feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the

stranger and visiting the sick, Jesus says, “What you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Jesus turns us humans toward each other for the proper expression of our love-of-God. We show how much we love God, **through** how much we care and are concerned for other people. Love of God, as a concept, is vague and numinous but Jesus makes it clear that we love God best through loving the neighbor next to us. That is His way, and we are called to do the same. Love of neighbor is love of God.