

## Thirtieth Sunday in: What Must We Do?

A lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest of all the laws. There were 613 of them in Hebrew Scripture. Which was the most important?

Jesus responded to the lawyer's question with two quotations from the Torah, the *Books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy*. The first quotation was the Sacred Jewish Prayer called the Shema Israel. This was a prayer contained in the sixth chapter of the Book of *Deuteronomy* 6:5. This is recited by pious Jews every morning and evening, "Hear this, O Israel, Shema Israel, God is One. You shall love your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind." The second quotation came from the Book of *Leviticus*, 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We cannot just love God part time, we have to love Him with everything we have. We cannot just be good to our neighbor sometimes, we have to treat our neighbors in the same way that we care for ourselves.

The heart of Christian morality is the desire to love God fully, completely, and to love others as unique reflections of God's love. We can see an analogy in the love we must have in the love that good parents have for their children. Parents do not try to find the minimal amount of love they must have to be good parents. Parents continually give their love because they know their children need their love. Parents do not love their children because they are afraid that if they do not love their children God will punish them. Parents love their children because they are their children. Parents love their children for whom they are, expressions of love, loving them back. Parents do not love their children due to their looks, talents, or intelligence. They love them because they are their children. God loves us because we are His children.

Jesus is not calling us to be minimalists. He is calling us to love God and neighbor completely, without counting the cost.

Shema Israel. God wants us to love him with our whole mind, our whole heart, and our whole soul.

"Give me your mind," the Lord says, "Do not just think about me when it is convenient for you. Do not destroy your minds with evil thoughts. No, give me your whole minds," the Lord says. "Are you distressed? Do you despair? Have your children or your parents, relatives or friends hurt you? Give me your mind, love me with your thoughts and I will transform your thoughts to my way of thinking. I will give you wisdom." We all have negative thoughts regarding other people. These thoughts are destroying us. We can get them under control and even eliminate them. There is a trick. We need to pray for the people who have hurt us. We need to pray for those whose very existence irritate us. When we do this, not only does our pain diminish, but we are giving our negative thoughts to God who turns them into a source of grace. Prayer is amazing. Not only does God listen to our needs; He heals us when our own minds attack us.

"Give me your hearts," the Lord says. He wants our whole hearts. He wants us to love him with every part of ourselves, even those parts that feel empty. He wants us to love him by loving others, spouses, children, parents, neighbors. He does not want part of our hearts. He wants all of our hearts. If there is a part of our love that we cannot share with God, such as the love a married person may have for someone else, then this itself is not real love because God is not in that love. The only love that is real is the love that gives. This is the love where He is present. This is the love that God wants us to have for each other. Loving God with our whole heart is really loving our neighbors as ourselves because it is loving as God loves.

God wants our whole soul. God wants all those qualities that distinguish us from animals. He wants our ability to love and to think, but also our ability to imagine, our ability to choose, our ability to express ourselves as individuals, our ability to be who we are, created in his image and likeness.

*Shema Israel!* You shall love the Lord with your whole mind, your whole hearts and your whole soul. If we want to have meaning in our lives, if we want to die knowing that we have been faithful to the whole reason we have been created, then we have to give all we have back to God.

"Love your neighbor as yourself." In his encyclical on love, *Deus Caritas Est*, *God is Love*, Pope Benedict noted the three words for love used by the ancient Greeks: eros, philia, and agape. Eros refers to physical love without any spiritual qualities. Philia refers to the love of friendship. This is the love people have for each other. Agape refers to love that is the heart of the relationship with God. Agape is the love that wants others to join us in a relationship with God. Christian love should be shared with everyone, regardless of our feelings. It is the kind of love which Jesus commanded that we show even to those who continue to hurt us: "Love your enemies" the Lord commanded. Loving our neighbors as ourselves means that just as we want to be united to God, we want others to be united to God. When this becomes the focus of our relationships, then we are loving others as Christ taught us to love.

I want to flesh this out. Let's say you entered into a business partnership with a friend. As time goes on, the business is not showing the profit it initially showed. Then, after a few years, the government came knocking. Taxes had not been paid because your partner had been embezzling from the business. Not only do you lose the business, you lose your home, your car, and so forth. Now your wife and children have to make due in a small apartment. Meanwhile, your former partner has initiated a law suit against you.

And Jesus says, "Love your enemies." How are you supposed to do that? Well, when we get into a situation like this, we have to strengthen our relationship with God by increasing our prayer life. We need to pray that our former partner will turn from evil and himself embrace a relationship with God. This is tough. We see what this guy has done to our family and everything about us wants to violate the Second Commandment and wish that he suffer the torments of hell. But Jesus is saying, "No, wish the opposite.

Wish that he change his life and go to heaven.” God wants our love to win others over for him. That is the meaning of “when someone slaps you on your right cheek, offer him your left cheek.”

Being a Christian is tough business. It means following the one who on the cross forgave his executioners, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Love God with your whole heart, our whole soul and your whole mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.” This sums up everything there is in the law and the prophets.

The lawyer asked, "What does God want from us?"

Jesus answered, "He wants it all."