

2020 A 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time Oct. 25

If you've ever sweated through a job interview, then you know what it's like to hold your breath as you wait for that next question. There is a story of a young woman who went for an interview for her admission into a top business school. The head professor began the interview. "We can ask you ten easy questions or one really difficult question," he said. "Choose carefully which you want."

The young woman thought for a moment and said, "I would like to answer one really difficult question." The professor scowled. "Okay, if that your choice," he said, "Which comes first, day or night." The seconds ticked by while she pondered, then, looked up with a smile and said, "The day comes first."

"And why would you say that?" the professor asked. "Sorry, sir," the young woman said, "but you assured me that I wouldn't need to answer the second difficult question."

Just like last week, our gospel passage for today is about the leaders asking Jesus difficult questions, not because they wanted real answers, but because they wanted to trap Jesus and make him not only look foolish but also less popular with the Jewish people.

They ask Jesus, "**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?**" No matter what Jesus answers, he's going to be wrong—they thought. But Jesus doesn't take the bait. Instead of just choosing one important or popular religious law, Jesus takes them all the way to the very foundation of God's laws, to the One Big Law, the foundation of everything else. And then he throws in a second one for good measure.

He said, "**You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.** The second is like it: "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

In another way Jesus was questioning them, "Why do are you so stuck on the Law? Why do you elevate your love for the Law above both love for God and one's neighbor?" Law has no purpose apart from love for God and one's neighbor."

Love is at the center of our faith. How can we minimize the importance of these verses? Here is what **Christian faith is all about: Love of God and love of neighbor.** Note that each of these commandments are in the Old Testament. Israel needed to be reminded

of what was central, what was fundamental, what was truly essential to their faith—just as Christians needed to be reminded today.

If we love God wholeheartedly, our lives will align with God's character and will. Seven hundred years before Jesus, the prophet Jeremiah promised the people of Israel that someday God would make a new covenant with them. In this new covenant, God will put His Law into their minds and write it on their hearts (Jer. 31:33). That's what happens when we love God wholeheartedly. We are no longer judged by the Law, but by our relationship with the Lawgiver—God. Our love for God compels us to live in a way that glorifies God. The love of God shapes our character and motivates us to share God's love with others.

That is to say, **the best way to show our love of God is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.** Think about it. It's fairly easy to fake our love for God. We can wear Christian t-shirts and tattoos. Attend Bible studies. Post Bible verses to our Instagram account. Attend Sunday Masses. All these outward activities look like convincing evidence of our love for God.

But loving our neighbor as ourselves—we cannot fake for long. It requires seeing our neighbor as made in the image of God. It requires self-sacrifice.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest tells about a prayer he heard an old man pray at a prayer-meeting in Africa, "Lord, let me never move into a house with stone." Rohr had no idea what this man meant. So, he asked the man after the service was over. The old man said, "You know here in Africa we live in huts, and huts have no doors. That is why your family is my family, and my family is your family. But as soon as you move into a stone house, you will have a door and put on it a lock. And behind the locked door you begin to accumulate more and more things. Then you have to spend the rest of your life protecting what all you have acquired.

That's a tough story for us to hear. We live in an individualistic culture. We expect everyone to mind their own business and take care of their own needs. We are the people living in stone houses. And Jesus is challenging us with his teaching. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind? Then prove it by moving out of your stone house. Prove it by throwing open your locked doors and putting the needs of others ahead of your own needs. **Our love for our neighbor is a proof of our love for God.** That is the truth. Do you accept it or reject it? Can you give it or withhold it? Seems like a simple question.