

LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL

MARK 12:28-34a

23RD SUN AFTER PENT./ALL SAINTS DAY SUN NOV 1, '15

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.' ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Today we celebrate All Saint's Day.

As we think about saints, heroes of faith throughout history,
who have been important spiritual leaders
or those who have been important to us personally
who have led the way to heaven before us,
and as we think these days about how we plan to follow
these saints in our personal spiritual lives
what kind of things are important for us to pay attention to?
Last Wed., some campaigning to lead our country had debate.
Some of them were unhappy with questions being asked,
thought they wasting time with unimportant things.
In Mark 12, Jesus' opponents were debating with him.
in v. 28, one of scribes wants focus on important things
so he opens it up to Jesus: What is most important?
Word translated "important" in these verses
literally means first, what comes first?
Few Sundays ago, in children's message, I had two jars
full of rocks, gravel and sand
One had sand first, then gravel, then rocks that didn't all fit.
Other had rocks first, then gravel and sand around them.
Point was, in our lives, crammed with many things,
we need to put the important things first.
One reason what comes first in our lives is important
is that one thing leads to another
so what comes first makes difference in what comes next.

SAINTS ARE LED BY FAITH TO LOVE GOD
LOVE FOR GOD LEADS TO LOVE FOR OTHERS
JESUS' LOVE LEADS US TO GOD'S KINGDOM

SAINTS ARE LED BY FAITH TO LOVE GOD

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in v. 28, when scribe asks "which commandment,"
word he uses for which also means "what kind of" command.

Other places in Bible also record the summary,
"you shall love the Lord with all your heart, soul & might."
which is quote from Deut. 6:5

But notice what Jesus mentions first here.

He starts with Deut. 6:4: The most important is,
"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

This is Jewish statement of faith, known as great Shema,
Shema means "hear" or "listen."

This is the answer to what comes first, before anything we do:
faith in God and who he is and what he does.

What kind of command comes first?

It is the call to have faith in the one true God.

Heb. 11 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please him."

In Deut. 5 and Exod. 20, where we find 10 commandments,
which in Hebrew are literally called the 10 words,
Before God says "You shall have no other God's before me."

He says, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you
out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

The first word is what God himself has done for us.

In Egypt and in other cultures there were many gods,
so your loyalty had to be divided between them.

But if there is only one God who does everything for us,
then all our loyalty and love belong to him alone.

Today's epistle from 1 John 3 says,

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should
be called children of God...when he appears we will be like him,
because we shall see him as he is."

It is God's nature to be perfectly and totally loving.
his calling us his children is a call to be like him.
Seeing him as he is, when he fully appears on last day,
and as he reveals himself to us in word & sacraments,
is what causes us to be like him.

As John also wrote: we love because he first loved us.
If we really know & believe how much he loves us,
why wouldn't we love him completely?

It is the love God gives us
and the faith he gives us by revealing himself to us,
and the righteousness he gives us through faith
that makes us holy, that is saints.

But this love for God also always leads to something else.

LOVE FOR GOD LEADS TO LOVE FOR OTHERS

³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The question, "Which commandments is most important?"
comes from fact that in Jewish tradition, are xxx commands,
coinciding with their count of xxx parts of the body.

We are not used to having an exact count, but it is true,
proper relationships with others can be complicated,
Scientific study of brain has concluded people are equipped
to have about 150 close relationships
with family, co-workers, neighbors, friends, etc.

How do you keep them all straight?

I compare godly relationships not to whole body but backbone
with many bones that must be kept in straight relationship.

If they are out of line, crooked, we have pain
and difficulty doing what we need to do.

Same thing happens if we are crooked, out of line,
in relationships with other people.

Bible summarizes God's rule for relationships

"love your neighbor as yourself."

Some have said, "so you can't truly love your neighbor
unless you first love yourself."

He have to properly understand what love really is.

Love is not just a good feeling about others or ourselves
but wanting what is good for self or others.

Like God, who always wants what is good for us,
even when he feels angry about our sins.

We may like feeling good. This can mean just relaxing all day,
eating whatever tastes good, doing whatever we enjoy.
But is this truly good for us in long run? No.

It would lead to poverty, sickness and misery!

We may imagine loving others means feeling good
so we may love others as long as they make us feel good
and we may try to do whatever makes others
feel good about us.

Is this true love, what is really good for others? Not at all!

This is why God, who loves us, has given commandments
that explain what is truly good for both us and for others.

It is good for others & us to not just ignore parents
& other authorities but respect & listen to them.

It is good for others & us to not just to take life for granted
& waste it but to protect human life and health.

It is good for others & us to not just be sexually promiscuous
but faithful to our spouse.

It is good for others & us to not just get what we want
however we can but to earn it.

It is good for others & us to not just say whatever seems
to our advantage at the time but to tell the truth.

All these things may feel hard at the time
but love is what is best in the long run.

Thinking of saints today reminds us that life we want to live
is not just for here and now but forever.

JESUS' LOVE LEADS US TO GOD'S KINGDOM

³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Question, "What kind of commandment is first?"

reflects fact that in O.T. God gave Israel 3 kinds of laws.

One kind was laws on personal relationships with God
and other people, which we have been thinking about.

Another kind was political laws for kingdom of Israel.

We don't live in that kingdom today & both O.T. and N.T.
make clear we live by laws of country where we live.

Another kind was ceremonial laws about how to worship,
details about sacrifices, which pictured & pointed forward
to final sacrifice Jesus made for all our sins.

It was virtually impossible to keep all the laws at once.

Parable of Good Samaritan is about tension between
relationship law about caring for the neighbor
and ceremonial law about ritual purity.

Scribe Jesus is talking to recognizes that
right loving relationships with God and neighbors
is more important than details of offerings & sacrifices.

But Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

What does it take to actually get into the kingdom of God
and into the kingdom of heaven with all the saints?

It takes more than our keeping the law because
we can't keep all of it perfectly.

When people die, it is common to say how good they were
by talking about how they were kind & helpful to others.

But what about what is even more important,
loving God above all things with faithful devotion?

Can anyone claim to love God with all his heart and soul?

Does anyone love God with all his mind & understanding?

Has anyone loved God with all his might and strength?

There is only one who can honestly say yes. That is Jesus.

And Jesus is the one who has loved all of us
more than himself.

He has loved us with all his heart & all his soul
& all his mind & all his strength.

He was willing to suffer for us emotionally & socially
& spiritually & physically through his whole life
& finally in his death for us.

His keeping the whole law for us is more than all the
whole burnt offerings & sacrifices put together,
because it once and for all made up for all our failure
to keep God's law

and it is because of this alone that we are made holy saints
who join in praising him in the kingdom of light.

SAINTS ARE LED BY FAITH TO LOVE GOD

What he has done for us, revealed in his word & sacraments
is what leads us to faith, which is the only way
to have any relationship with God at all.

LOVE FOR GOD LEADS TO LOVE FOR OTHERS

It is a relationship with a loving God as his children
seeing him as he is and seeing selves for what we are,
that leads us to right relationship with our brothers & sisters
JESUS' LOVE LEADS US TO GOD'S KINGDOM

What comes first is hearing that the Lord our God is One
The Father, Son & Holy Spirit are the one true God.
& hearing what God has done, delivering us from slavery to sin
is what brings us into his kingdom, communion of saints,
and living in this kingdom of his grace
is what makes us live the way we do now & forever.