

Jesus' summary of the law in today's gospel echoes the first reading from Leviticus. We are called not only to love God with heart, soul, and mind, but also to love our neighbor as ourselves.

That sounds simple enough to our ears, but is it really? For the ethical but not religious person, the love of God is easily conflated (I love to use that word) into the love for the other, or as Jesus puts it, "neighbor". For this person there is likely no need of a demonstrable expression of love for God. For still others (read atheist) there is only love for the other; God is a non-entity.

For you and me, the intriguing point is Jesus' attaching the two familiar commandments to each other. First J says, ***You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart...soul...and mind...And a second is like it you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*** Jesus suggests these two are linked together or, as one Lectio Divina participant put it the other day; these two commandments are two sides of the same coin.

Behind the testy exchange between Jesus and the Pharisee was the rabbinic debate over classifying and ranking not only the 2 or 10 but 600+ commandments! There was continuous discussion in these circles about which of the laws carried more weight than others, had more importance than others, or could be more loosely observed. ***Teacher,*** Jesus is asked, ***which commandment in the law is the greatest?***

Jesus resisted every effort to drive a wedge between love for God and love for neighbor, insisting forcefully on their inner connectedness. He does not pick one commandment over all others. He links these two and holds them up as having absolute priority above and giving interpretation to ***all the law and the prophets.***

For Jesus the center and foundation of all 613 commandments is love (*agapè*). He articulates the underlying foundation of love upon which are built all the law and prophets, and he prays that we come to believe that - in him, his cross and resurrection - the law and prophets are perfectly (we hold astonishingly) fulfilled!

So where do you and I go with this teaching of Jesus today? I want to go inside, where Jesus points in his initial reply, ***you shall love...with all your heart, soul, and mind.*** As disciples of Jesus we are to love from the whole self, from within, that is, from the heart.

Priest and theologian John Shea shared this story about a busy man:

One day a certain man hurriedly headed out the door for work. In his path was his three-year-old son playing with blocks. The man patted the boy on the head, stepped over him, opened the door, and went outside. Halfway down the walk a guilt bomb exploded within him.

“What am I doing?” he thought to himself. “I am ignoring my son. I never play with him. He’ll be old before I know it.” In the background of his thoughts he heard the pounding rhythms of “Cat’s in the Cradle,” Harry Chapin’s ballad to lost fatherhood. He returned to the house and sat down with his son and began to build blocks.

After two minutes, the boy said, “Daddy, why are you mad at me?”

“It is not only what we do that counts,” Shea writes, “but from where we do it. Our actions come from different places inside us...Playing blocks out of guilt is not the same as playing blocks out of love, and the difference is quickly spotted, even by three-year-olds, especially by three-year-olds.”

Shea continues, “Jesus is concerned about the inner state of the acting person. Mindless compliance makes one an outer person - conforming but not understanding...In touch with the inner configuration of divine and human love, you move among the laws knowing their ultimate purpose. So you know when to heed them, when to modify them, and when to dismiss them.”

Jesus calls for a new consciousness of love for God, and neighbor and self, a new perspective, high and lifted up, that comes from the heart.

Come to this table of grace; feast on the bread of life and cup of blessing to nourish your heart, soul and mind.