

Thursday 9th in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (Mk 12,28-34): One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, «Which commandment is the first of all?». Jesus answered, «The first is: ‘Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength’. And after this comes another one: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. There is no commandment greater than these two».

The teacher of the Law said to him, «Well spoken, Master; you are right when you say that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice».

Jesus approved this answer and said, «You are not far from the kingdom of God». But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

«There is no commandment greater than these two»

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Today, in Mark's Gospel, we see how one of the scribes asks Jesus: «Which commandment is the first of all?» (Mk 12:28). The question is somewhat cunning. In the first place, because he is trying to establish some sort of ranking amongst the different commandments; and, secondly, because his question is centered in the Law. This is logical, bearing in mind that the question comes from a master of the Law.

The Lord's answer takes to pieces the spirituality of that «master of the Law» And

the attitude of the disciple of Jesus with respect to God can be summed up in two points: «You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart» (Mk 12:30) and «You shall love your neighbor as yourself» (Mk 12:31). The religious behavior is defined in his relationship with God and with his neighbor; and the human behavior, in his relationship with the others and with God. St. Augustine says the same with other words: «Love God, and do whatever you please». Love God and love the others, and all the rest will just be a consequence of this plenitude of love.

The teacher of the Law understands it perfectly well. And he adds that to love God with all one's heart, and one's neighbor as oneself, «is more important than any burnt offering and sacrifice» (Mk 12:33). God is awaiting our reply, our total deliverance, «with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength» (Mk 12:30), for God means Truth, Goodness, and generous dedication to others. «Offerings and sacrifices» have a meaning only insofar they will be the true expression of this double love. And to think that, at times, we use the “little commandments” and «the offerings and sacrifices» as stumbling-block to criticize or wound others!

Jesus approves the reply of the master of the Law with «You are not far from the kingdom of God» (Mk 12:34). For Jesus, whoever loves his neighbor over everything else is not far from God.