Friday of the Third Week of Lent

Gospel text (*Mk* 12:28-34): One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

"There is no other commandment greater than these."

Fr. Pere MONTAGUT i Piquet
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today the Lenten liturgy presents love as the deepest root of God's self-communication: "The soul cannot live without love. She always wants to love something because love is the stuff she is made of, and through love I created her." (Saint Catherine of Siena). God is all-powerful love, love to the extreme, crucified love: "It is there [on the cross] that this truth can be contemplated" (Benedict XVI). This Gospel is not only a self-revelation of how God himself – in his Son – wants to be loved. With a commandment from Deuteronomy: "Love the Lord, your God" (Dt 6:5) and another from Leviticus: "Love your neighbor" (Lev 19:18), Jesus brings the fullness of the Law to completion. He loves the Father as true God born of the true God and, as the Word made man, creates the new Humanity of the children of God, brothers who love one another with the love of the Son.

Jesus' call to communion and mission requires participation in his very nature; it is an intimacy that must be entered into. Jesus never claims to be the goal of our prayer and love. He gives thanks to the Father and lives continually in his presence. The mystery of Christ draws us to love for God—invisible and inaccessible—while at the same time being the path to recognition, truth in love and life for our visible and present brother. The most valuable thing is not the burnt offerings on the altar, but Christ who burns as the only sacrifice and offering so that we may be in Him one altar, one love.

This unification of knowledge and love woven by the Holy Spirit allows God to love in us and to use all our capacities, and grants us the power to love like Christ, with his same filial and fraternal love. What God has united in love, man cannot separate. This is the greatness of he who submits himself to the Kingdom of God: love of self is no longer an obstacle but an ecstasy to love the one God and a multitude of brothers.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The present days [of Lent] are especially suitable to practice the good of charity, so that those who want to undertake the Passover of the Lord with sanctification of soul and body should try to acquire this grace above all.” (Saint Leo the Great)

- “Faith is giving space to this love of God; it is making room for the power, for the power of God, for the power of One who loves me, who is in love with me and who wants this joy with me. This is faith. This is believing: it is making room for the Lord to come and change me.” (Francis)

- “... The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 2196)