

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Gospel text (Mk 12,28-34): A teacher of the Law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked 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.

«Which commandment is the first of all?»

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Today, it is common to speak of the love towards the brethren, christian justice, etc. but the love towards God is seldom spoken.

So we have to look at the answer Jesus gives to the lawyer, who, with the best intention asks: "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mk 12:29). It was not surprising because among so many laws and regulations, the Jews sought to establish a principle that would unify all formulations of God's will.

Jesus responds with a simple sentence that, even today, Jews recite several times a day: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mk 12:29-30). Meaning, Jesus reminds us that, first, we must proclaim the primacy of God's love as man's fundamental task, and this is logical and fair, because God loved us first.

However, for Jesus it is not enough to remind us about this fundamental and basic commandment but adds that one must love one's neighbor as oneself. And, as Pope Benedict XVI says, "the love to God and the love to your neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love that comes from God, who loved us first. "

But one aspect that is not discussed is that Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves, not more than oneself, not less either. We deduce that he commands us that we should love ourselves, since we're also the handiwork of God and his creatures, loved by Him.

If we have then, as a rule of life, the double commandment of love to God and neighbor, Jesus tells us: "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12:34). If we live this ideal, we will make of the earth a general rehearsal of Heaven.