Thursday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

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"

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Today, in Mark's Gospel, we see how one of the scribes asks Jesus: "Which is the first of all the commandments?" (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 worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mk 12:33). God is awaiting our reply, our total deliverance, "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your 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.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "I love You, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love You eternally... My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love You, I want my heart to repeat it to You as often as I draw breath." (Saint Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney)

- "If the love of God has planted deep roots in a person, then he is able to love even those who do not deserve it, as God does us." (Benedict XVI)

- "It follows that we must necessarily accept his words and have complete faith in him and acknowledge his authority. He is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent. Who could not place all hope in him? Who could not love him when contemplating the treasures of goodness and love he has poured out on us?" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 2086)