

We continue with a common theme

The Pharisees trying to trap Christ

They try to attack him from their own frame of reference

But he keeps opening their horizon

To ways of thinking they would never come to on their own

God gave Moses the 10 Commandments

The Pharisee, over time, expanded this to over 600 laws and rules

These governed every aspect of the daily life of a good Jew

With so many to choose from

They figure there must be a hierarchy to the law

Each Pharisee could select which one was most important

And there were many arguments at the time over this

So they come to Christ today

Tell us which of the laws is the most important

Christ gives them their answer

But not what they expect

He goes outside the box

He doesn't go to one of their rules or laws

He doesn't even select one of the ten

He gives them, and us, the heart of all the commandments

Something so simple to understand

But a challenge to live

The entirety of the faith can be found in two commandments: first:

Love the Lord your God

With all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind

The second:

Love your neighbor as yourself

Anyone can grasp the meaning of these two commands

But it takes a hero to live them perfectly

They give us our benchmark, our goal

So we know when we miss the target

We cannot love God and ignore our neighbor

St John puts it this way:

If anyone says 'I love God', but hates his brother is a liar:

For he who does not love his brother, whom he can see

Cannot love God whom he cannot see

We need the love of God to become tangible in our lives

And we do that through love of neighbor

That is what our first reading was about

God gives specific instructions at the time

It is not an all-encompassing list

It is a lesson that to love isn't about words

It is about our actions and our inactions

Do not oppress an alien

Do not take advantage of others

You were once an alien yourself

Do not oppress other human beings

We are all aliens

Alienated from God, from our true family

We become aliens through sin

Both original sin and our actual sins

We are all in need of God's mercy

We have received His mercy

And if we are not alienated from Him in serious sin

It is by his grace

It is by His grace we are here

And it is our call to walk with others

To bring them to experience God's mercy

We are called to treat others as we wish to be treated

Don't make demands we would not want demanded of us

Love them as we love our selves

This is what Christ is telling the Pharisee

The commandments are not about the law

They are about love

If it were about the law

You could make a good case for almost any of the laws

If not, they would be dismissed

Kind of like all unnecessary personnel do not have to come in today

Also, if it was about the law as law

Then if one could fulfill it perfectly

You could earn your salvation

And as St James says: *'Whoever keeps the law but fails in one point*

Has become guilty of all of it'

If the law is your benchmark

There are no options but to keep them perfectly

At least exteriorly

But Jesus sees more than the law

He knows the heart

So he goes to the heart when asked

The greatest Commandment is to love the Lord your God

With all your heart

All your soul

And all your mind

And love your neighbor as yourself

None of us need to be told to love yourself

This is automatic

How we do it might be called into question

But all of us love ourselves

At the most basic level

We seek food, shelter, clothing and protection

Love is the goal of our lives

Because we are made in the image and likeness of He whom is Love

The Commandments are not about being fulfilled as law

But we are called to fulfill them in love

They all hold an equal importance

Because they all come from the mouth of God

So why do we fulfill the law?

Is it to get a checklist for when we see Jesus face to face?

See Lord, my baptism, Eucharist

Confirmed, married

Every Sunday; check

I supported the Church and went to confession every year

On and on the list goes

But if that is the reason we do things

We are at risk of slipping up on one thing

And lose everything

We don't come to Mass to earn God's love

We are loved

So we come to Mass

We don't bring our children to baptism so God will love them

God loves them, so we bring them to this sacrament

To bring them into his family

We don't chase after anything in the law to earn something

We are loved

So we keep the law in response and in thanksgiving for being loved

We are so used to the law

In the United States the law is almost sacred

In a government, that is a good thing

Because it levels the playing field

We know where we stand

Other countries are not so fortunate

And in many cases we are starting to slide down another path as well

**When the law can mean whatever the current office holders
determine**

It is difficult to get a firm footing

But our faith is not based on this law

It is based on relationship

A relationship with the One that is Love itself

In seminary, one of my professors had a plaque

Only God

Nothing more

Nothing less

Nothing else

**Similar to the saying over the retreat house at Gethsemane Abby
in Kentucky**

God Alone

When we see these things, and we decide to live them

It can be frightening

Because we think it means that we will lose our freedom

This particular life or calling

I will HAVE to do this or that

But the opposite is true

When we live this

No matter what our calling

To be a married person

A priest

A single person in the world

We are free

Not free from anything

But free for something

Free to love God

With our whole heart, soul and mind

Free to love our neighbor as ourself

Free to become the son or daughter of God we are meant to be