

I had a spiritual director while in seminary

On his wall there was a framed plaque

It read:

God Alone

Nothing more

Nothing less

Nothing else

This sums up our readings today

In our first reading

The Israelite people are given explicit direction from God

They were to treat others with compassion and justice

Not taking advantage of their weakness

Defending the defenseless

Especially the widows and orphans

They were to recall they themselves were in this situation

They had been slaves and disenfranchised

Helpless in their own ability

Totally dependent on God

And to truly be God's people

They were to show His love to others

Love their neighbors as themselves

But this instruction did not take hold

By the time Christ arrived

The Pharisees had expanded the 10 commandments to over 600 laws

These governed every moment of their lives

And they wrote in exceptions for themselves

So they could always find excuses in the law

So they come to Christ today

Like last week, full of false praise

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?

They thought they had him again

Choosing any one of the commandments

They would be able to find fault with him through their own law

But Jesus does not fall into their trap

He knows the laws are necessary

But they are more than a list of rules to be followed

They are a gift from God

Given to us, to lead us to salvation

It is not about ranking them

Pitting them against each other

Jesus gives an answer they did not see coming

Rather than playing their game of one-upmanship

He goes to the heart

He summarizes the meaning of the law

Love the Lord your God

With all your heart,

All your soul

With all your mind

And then he gives a second commandment

Love your neighbor as yourself

In essence, this is what Moses was telling them

Remember who you are

What God has done for you

Love Him with all your might

With all that you are

And love your neighbor as yourself

Love is the goal of our lives

Because we are made in the image and likeness of God

Whom is Love itself

All the commandments are important

Not to be used as an exercise in either / or

But to be lived as both / and

St John puts this teaching this way in his Epistle

If anyone says they love God

And hates his brother is a liar

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen

Cannot love God whom he has not seen

These two precepts are like our two lungs

We might be able to survive with only one

But we cannot live as we are called to live

If we seek only the love of God

We seek a private spirituality

A personal relationship with Jesus Christ

But we are called into community

To leaven to the world

To have a living relationship with the Trinity

We may know all the prayers

We may never miss a Mass

But everything is on the surface

Our faith never reaches the heart

Or we may simply love our brothers and sisters

Maybe I can say

I am a good person

I don't steal or slander

I have not killed anyone

I try to help my neighbor

I even give to hurricane relief

But I don't need the church thing

I can find God in nature

This life is also lived on the surface

I do these things based on emotions

How they make me feel

They have no depth

They can easily run empty

Becoming a burden

We are called to both

To love God with all our being

And as Catholic Christians that entails the externals

Getting to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

Getting to confession at least once a year

Holy Communion at least once a year

Being married in the Church

And it is witnessing to the world

To our family's first

Then to our work, our schools, our businesses

Wherever and to whomever our lives take us

Breathing with both lungs

Living sacramental lives of worship

And lives of service

Both giving life to the other

Both feeding off the other

So we might live something similar to that plaque

God alone

Nothing more

Nothing less

Nothing else