

Which is the greatest commandment

Homily by Deacon Robert Millott

23rd Sunday after Pentecost 2021

Mark 12:28-34

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
AMEN

In today's gospel reading a scribe with good intentions asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment. As you all know there are ten commandments or the Decalogue that God handed down to Moses. In the word "decalogue" the root *deca-* is combined with *logos*, Greek for "word". In the Bible the book of Exodus chapter 20: 1-17 you will find the original Decalogue, or Ten Commandments that were handed to Moses by God on top of Mount Sinai. In Jewish and Christian tradition, the Ten Commandments are regarded as laws handed down from the highest authority and as the foundation of morality. The commandments are 1. You shall have no other gods before me. 2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. 4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 5. Honor your father and your mother. 6. You shall not

murder. 7. You shall not commit adultery. 8. You shall not steal. 9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. And 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. The last five of these commandments, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago have to do with the way we treat people. The first five deal with how we treat God.

Now if someone were to come up to you and ask you "*what is the greatest commandment?*", how would you reply? Most if not all of us learned the 10 commandments as kids. Is it possible for us to pick one that is the greatest? Is it even appropriate for us to select one as being greater than the other?

Jesus answers the question for the scribe and for us. He doesn't start with the Ten Commandments instead he goes to the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

The Shema is a beautiful prayer. There's a reason why God's people have been praying these words for millennia. They are simple words with the capacity to reshape the course of an entire life. The Shema can keep God's love and loyalty in the forefront of your mind and drive you towards obedience, not out of obligation or duty, but out of love. Jesus said in John 14:21 He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

The Shema is one of four scripture passages that were written on parchment and then put into a small leather box called a Phylactery that was worn strapped on the forehead and left arm of Jewish men except on the Sabbath and holy days. The three other passages were Ex. 13:2-10, 11-17, and Deut. 4:13-22. The custom for doing this is found in the literal interpretation of Exodus 13:16, and Deut. 6: and 11:18.

The Shema is the greatest commandment for us to keep and the second one Jesus tells us is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Who is our neighbor? Your neighbor is not just the person next door or down the road but the person we see in the store when we go shopping or in the waiting room at the doctor and the person sitting next to you here in church. How can we love our neighbor? First by obeying the last five of the Ten Commandments. That would be by not committing adultery, slandering one another, or being jealous of their possessions. We can help feed them and clothe them by donating clothing to a charity and food to the Coffee County Food Bank. If a neighbor is sick and you know about that, visit them, and see what they need. Take someone to the store or doctor. There are many ways we can love our neighbor. When we all do things like this the Kingdom will come.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory, world without end. AMEN