

## **“Teacher, which Commandment is the Greatest?”**

**Matthew 22:34-40**

This is the question that a “**scholar**” of the **Mosaic Law** asked **Jesus**. It seems odd that an “**expert**” well versed in the **Law** would ask such a question.

Is he setting up a trap for **Jesus**? **Yes!**

**Jesus**, however, answers him by simply quoting what was written in the **Law**:

***“You shall love the Lord, your God,  
With all your heart, with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.***

***This is the greatest and first commandment.***

***The second is like it:***

***You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”***

**Jesus** is teaching us that the “**Greatest Commandment**” is **two-fold**.

The **first half** of the **Commandment** teaches us a “**complete abandonment to God**.” We must “**completely surrender**” **our heart, mind, and soul** to our **God**.

When we do so **God** bestows upon us many **graces** to fulfill the **second part** of the **Commandment**, that is, to **love our neighbor as ourselves**.

The latter part seems more challenging for most of us than the **first part!**

It seems that for many of us, **loving our neighbor—friend, colleague, relative, a religious person** is far easier than **“loving oneself.”**

**Why?** For starters we **know ourselves** better than anyone else. We also know our **past and current weaknesses and strengths** and our **unspoken negative thoughts**.

**So, what does it mean to love our neighbor?**

**Loving our neighbor** certainly **does not** mean that we **love** our acquaintances, or even those who have **hurt us** with the same **kind** of **love** and **affection** we have toward our **parents, spouses, children, friends, loved ones, etc.**

We **love our neighbor by respecting** them as **children** of the **same God** and **brothers and sisters** of the **same Savior**. We are not **vindictive** with those who have **used and abused** us, **God** will **judge them** in **His time and in His way**.

The Great **Commandment** says that we are to **“love our neighbor as ourselves.”**

**What does it really mean “to love ourselves?”**

Are we talking about **loving ourselves** in a **selfish and self-centered** way? **Of course not!**

My pastoral experience with **Catholics** in general, has been that they have a **great difficulty** in **loving** themselves. **Why?**

Much has to do with our **upbringing** and the “**catholic guilt**” that was imposed on us!

People believe that “**loving themselves**” is **selfish and self-centered** and mistakenly believe that it is, what I call worshipping the “**Personal Trinity**”—**Me, Myself, and I.**

In this **Personal Trinity Jesus** is **not at the center** of our **lives, rather** all the **selfish desires and wants** become the **center** of our life.

There is an important lesson that this **Great Commandment** teach us, that is, **that** we will be **capable** of “**loving**” our **neighbor genuinely** when we “**love**” **ourselves adequately and compassionately and are self-forgiving.**

But if **we are not** willing to care for ourselves by “**loving**” in us **what God has created** then I **believe** that we will be “**incapable**” of **loving** our “**neighbor.**”

The **truth** of the matter is that we are **capable** of **loving** both **neighbor and self** because **God** has created out of love for love and to be loved. This type of "**love**" is **innate—it's in our heart and soul. Just as God** has given us also the innate knowledge of knowing what is **right and wrong, good, and evil.**

To **love authentically** takes **practice and commitment.**

It is a conscious **decision** we make each new day!

I will close with the beautiful words of **St. Paul** in **his Letter on Love to the Corinthians, chapter 13**, reminding them and us that there are many beautiful gifts but if all the spiritual gifts are **empty of Love** then they are **empty actions and words.**

**Our actions of love must be practical and concrete and must be seen in every circumstance in order to love God, neighbor, and self.**

**St. Paul** describes **genuine love** by these **active words:**

**Love is patient.**

**Love is kind.**

**Love is not jealous, pompous, inflated, or rude.**

**Love is not self-seeking.**

**Love is not quick-tempered.**

**Love does not brood over past injuries.**

**Love does not rejoice in our wrongdoing but only in the Truth.**

**Love bears all things.**

**Love believes in all things.**

**Love hopes in all things.**

**Love never ends because God Himself is love!**