30th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 25 Oct 2026 + Matt 22:34-40

Our Gospel today follows a similar line as last Sunday's, where we hear once again the Pharisees are trying to test Jesus, so as to find some excuse to condemn Him. Whereas last week they tried to bring Him down through a political trap, today they use a question of the Jewish Law. That is, what is the greatest commandment? And of course, Jesus passes the test. He begins with the so-called *Shema*—the "Creed" that devout Jews recite daily: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

If we try to apply this answer personally, at first, it seems great! That is, to keep all the commandments, we really only have to keep 2, and they seem simple enough. But when we dig deeper, it's not so easy. First of all, we have to ask, what exactly does it mean to *love God with all your heart, soul, and mind?* Let's look at each of these.

First, in its original context, the *heart* does not mean the emotions or feelings, as we usually use the term today. Rather, it meant the *will*—the place deep within us—the "seat" of our desires, and where we freely choose our actions. So we can say here that loving God with your whole heart means desiring God, and choosing God, above all else.

Next, Jesus says to love God with *all of your soul*. Again, in its context, the soul is the life-breath of a person, and it includes your body; it's what makes you, you! So to love God with your whole soul means that every ounce of your being is directed above all toward Him.

Finally, Jesus says to love God with *all of your mind*. If we love God, we will think with the mind of God. This means we need to learn from Him: learn His mind, and seek to conform our minds to His, rather than the other way around, and to be willing to change our own minds, even when it is difficult, or when His mind differs from the "mind" of society.

So if you really think about what Jesus is saying here, loving Him doesn't seem quite so easy! In fact, it seems nearly impossible! But let's set that aside for a moment and listen as the Lord continues: the 2nd greatest commandment is like the first: *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Now at first, we might again be tempted to think "this isn't so hard, because I don't really like myself all that much. I don't like my looks, personality flaws, etc." But if we consider how much we seek to please our desires each day: the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, the hobbies we pursue, we have to admit we really do love ourselves. And the Lord is calling us to love our neighbors to the same degree! Well, that seems nearly impossible too! So, given all this, what are we to do?

Well, we know God cannot expect us to do the impossible. And thankfully, we have witnesses showing us that it is indeed possible to truly love as God asks us: the Saints.

Today, I'd like to look at the writings of just one witness: St. John the Evangelist, who is fittingly called the "beloved disciple." St. John writes in his 1st letter (4:9): *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.* So God has loved us first—that is the only reason we can love Him back! Think of a newborn baby. When she first opens her eyes, hopefully the first thing she sees is another set of eyes, gazing lovingly back at her—beholding her. She feels herself cradled in human arms, holding her safe. She hears a sweet voice in her ears. She is literally embraced by love, and deep inside her, she is stirred to love in return. But if that loving embrace of mom or dad is absent, how can she ever be expected to know how to love?

God has shown us His face in Jesus Christ. St. John begins his 1st letter noting: *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands…we proclaim now to you…so that our joy may be complete (cf. 1:1-4).* God is no longer an unknowable mystery—we can see Him, hear Him, feel Him—not quite in the same way St. John did, but in a very real way still. We gaze upon Him in the Holy Eucharist. We hear His Word spoken to us, every bit as alive as it was 2,000 years ago. We feel His presence in the Holy Spirit, alive in our souls. We too are embraced by His love.

But if that were not enough, Jesus reveals the very depths of God's love for us. St. John continues, *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins,* so *we have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us* (4:10, 16). God loved us with all of His heart: He willed our greatest good—our salvation—so much, that he did the unthinkable: He sent His Son to die for us, in our place. So that we could be forgiven of our sins and become His children, heirs to eternal life. He loved us with all of His soul—Jesus gave His very life for us on the Cross: there wasn't anything more he could have given to us. And He loved us with all of His mind: He spoke to us the very word of God. As St. John put it in his Gospel (13:1), Christ *loved us to the end*.

So in Christ, God has made us his "neighbor", and He has loved us even more than He loves Himself! He has shown us what true love looks like. But He knows we are poor sinners, and so He has even given us the means to fulfill the commandment to love. St. Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans *the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* (5:5). The Holy Spirit enables us to keep the 2 greatest commandments. That is why they are not impossible; because God does most of the work!

So what are we to make of all this? We can say that to truly keep the commandments of God asks *everything* of us—there's no getting around it! But God has already given us everything! On our part, we have only to ask for it, to desire this gift: seeking it with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and not count the cost. The Father will not deny His Holy Spirit to any of His children who asks for it (cf. Luke 11:13). This is the secret of the Saints, and the narrow road to heaven.