Go Forth...
A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

THE ESSENCE OF FAITH



SUNDAY READINGS:

Exodus 22:20-26

Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51

Thessalonians 1:5-10

Matthew 22:34-40

ALL COMMANDMENTS IN A NUTSHELL

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus responding to the question of a scholar of the law: "Which commandment of the law is the greatest"? This is one of the occasions when the Pharisees were testing Jesus and trying to find an error in His teachings. Frequently, they would gather and plan to test Him. We will not focus on that; rather, we will focus on the response of Jesus. As expected, Jesus found a solution and was able to give a better, deeper response on which we can all reflect.

Profound Response. Jesus answered the question by summarizing the Ten Commandments, urging all of us keep two commandments. Jesus says: "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 the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The command "to love" is the central matter here. Most probably, what Jesus meant as the greatest commandment is simply "**to love**"—to love God and to love our neighbor. Loving God should be above all other aspects of life. Our love of God should lead us to love our neighbor, because to love God is to embrace the people that God loves, i.e., everyone. It may sound very simple, but it is obviously easier said than done. In a word, "loving" is our mission here on earth.

Ongoing Challenge. It seems very easy to say that we love, but it is difficult to love in a radical sense with all our heart, soul and mind and with all our being to the point of no holding back; this is something very challenging. Remember the story of the rich young man who wanted to follow Jesus; he said he had kept all the commandments, but when he was asked to sell his possessions and give to the poor, he went away sad and in sorrow for he had great possessions.

At times, we are like the rich young man. When we love God, we often only give a part of our love and we reserve a lot for ourselves. The challenge for us, therefore, is to give **all** in loving God. The two commandments, integrated into one mandate, call us to completely give ourselves to God and others.

Our love for God is oftentimes challenged by our unfaithfulness, while our love for our neighbor is oftentimes challenged by our preferences. We tend to love only those we can easily love. We must not lose hope, because, despite our unfaithfulness and despite our preferences in the way we love, God continues to be faithful in loving us. God will never have preferences.

Pope Francis' Insight. The pope has told us: "The very first truth that we receive in faith is that God loves us. It makes no difference whether you have already heard it or not, because first and foremost we are loved by God. This we cannot doubt; whatever happens in our life, every moment God loves us; [we love] because he loved us first." Truly, a profoundly significant, transformative truth, a missionary challenge!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Exodus 22:20-26
The Book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible, tells of the Sinai Covenant between God and Israel, the Chosen People. In addition to the Ten Commandments, there are numerous other rules, mandating charity toward others, especially the poor and those numerous "little ones" found in every society.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51
Today's psalm narrates the "attitude of gratitude" of a loving person. He trusts God, because God is his strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, stronghold, and horn of salvation. It appears that the psalmist never runs out of ways to describe God's overflowing kindness.

Second Reading: Thessalonians 1:5-10
On his second missionary journey, Saint Paul traveled to Macedonia (northern Greece) and to Achaia (southern Greece); he also carried the faith to Europe. Hearing from Timothy that the Church in Thessalonia was very vigorous, Paul writes this letter to encourage them; we can also hear Paul speaking to us.

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40
The Pharisees believed in the Law of Moses as well as in the 613 rabbinical traditions. The Sadducees, however, only believed in the Law and the Prophets, and not in the rabbinical traditions. The result was often a debate about the greatest of the commandments. Jesus' answer is clear; all is summarized in the one commandment to love God and neighbor.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► ***Living in Joyful Hope,*** ► ***Exploring Vatican II Treasures, and*** ► ***A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*** (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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