

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jun 6th 2013

We often seek clear and straightforward guidelines that help us to know what is important and to decide what to do. At the same time we are also aware that such guidelines do not exist, because of the complexity of the human experience and of diverse Christian beliefs and values that address the human experience. We know that simple guidelines are usually simplistic and can do more harm than good. Throughout human history, also the history of Christian communities, individuals and groups, who took certain beliefs and values very seriously, caused immense human suffering because they did not consider the wider context of these beliefs and values as well as of their actions.

The scribe in today's Gospel, who asked Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" also wanted a simple answer. Jesus responded saying that there are actually two answers to this question. First, you should love God. Second, you should love your neighbor. In the Holy Scriptures, a neighbor is anyone in need, who is in our reach, and who can be supported by us. No commandment is greater than these two. And these two commandments are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin. You cannot truly love God if you do not love your neighbor and you cannot truly love your neighbor if you do not love God. These inseparable commandments also mean that you love your neighbor through God and God through your neighbor. Ultimately, the core commandment of our faith is to love. Saint Augustine of Hippo summarized it saying *dilige, et quod vis fac* – love, and then do what you will. When love is the starting point of all what we do, we will know every moment of our life!

The first reading from the book of Tobit, presents us with an example of what this means. Tobit sent his son Tobiah to a distant relative, accompanied by the angel Raphael. When Raphael and Tobiah arrived, Tobiah met Sarah, the daughter of his relative, who was struck by extreme misfortune, was depressed and wished to die. She had been married seven times but all her husbands died soon after the wedding. Tobiah, realized that marrying Sarah is the right thing to do, and they got married. He recognized Sarah as his neighbor and showed her the appropriate support and love. His action was embedded in his love of God. Sarah and Tobiah trusted God, prayed and death did not harm Tobiah after the marriage. The reading of today illustrates how God cares for those who love him and who love others. It is a story of victory over hardship and deliverance from suffering through loving God and loving our neighbor.

Let us listen to our heart, inspired by the Gospel, to discover what we should do each day as we strive to love God and love our neighbor.

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