

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Charity is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:10)

Ex 22:20-26

"Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbour's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.

1 Thess 1:5c-10

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.



There were over 400 commandments in the Law of Moses and there are 1752 canons (rules) in the Canon Law of our Church. A righteous Jew should have known and obeyed them all. Should a righteous Catholic follow the same example? Yet, can it be done? Can we obey over 400 commandments or follow 1752 canons? There are many other things we need to learn and do in life. Could there be another way to find out what is the most important in life?

Love the Lord your God

There are many lords and many gods in this world. People build them temples and altars, and worship them. Yet, when Jesus says to us, "love the Lord your God", he has in mind his Father, the only true and living God.

Every Jew, since his childhood, daily recited the famous prayer *Shema Israel*: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God will all your

1 Thess 1:5c-10

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Matt 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.

heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' (Deuteronomy 6:5). They knew the living God. They experienced his powerful help. They thanked him and loved him deeply.

In 1960 he was put to prison. There was such a hunger that most of his companions had died. Three long years, he was just lying on a bed. He was unable to lift up a bottle of water. Then, better times came, eighteen years of work in a labor camp. He never got sick and was always protected. He was finally released in 1981. When I met him, I saw a happy face of an old man (he was seventy six at that time). When I asked him how he was able to survive I got this answer: 'He got me through.'

Love the Lord your God. This commandment was given to the Jewish people after their incredible escape from the land of Egypt, where they had been treated as slaves. They experienced God's constant saving presence during their journey through the desert into the Promised Land. They had the reason to love him.

We also have the reason to love God. Love the Lord your God, because he has given his only Son to save us and give us a new life. Jesus has come into this world, so we could live a life of grace, faith, hope, and love. God saved us from the power of sin and death. He gave up his Son for us. He sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts. We can say: 'Abba, Father,' and 'Jesus is the Lord.' He continues to journey with us through our personal high mountains and dark valleys, leading us into the Promised Land: the fullness of life in His presence.

The Jews loved God, because their have experienced His saving presence. We love God, because He has expressed His love for us in Jesus.

Love your neighbour as yourself

A story says that there was a wave of suicidal attempts among the young people in one of the Western countries. Apparently, they had everything, which the material world could provide for them, but their hearts were empty. They were unable to love themselves nor their neighbours. At that time, mother Teresa of Calcutta had learned about the problem and made

a proposal: 'send all those young people to me. I will help them.' Some came and engaged themselves in the ministry towards the destitute of India. That experience changed them for life. They found love and learned how to love others.

In our world such an obvious thing - to love oneself - is not obvious anymore. There are many signs that more and more people tend to destroy themselves and those whom, they say, they love. So many broken relationships, so many lonely people, so many young attempting to end their lives. Love is the only thing they need, but that is precisely what they lack.

The basic truth of our faith tells us that we are loved by God, with an unconditional love. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The love of God, which is poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, enables us to love ourselves and others. Love towards a neighbour can only flow from a heart that is deeply loved by God.

It is easy to find out whether someone has experienced God's love. If someone hates his neighbour, he may repeat many times 'God! I love you,' but his actions betrays his words. If, on the other hand, someone serves his neighbour, then you know that God's love reign in his life. God and neighbour cannot be separated. John tells us: 'If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet he hates his brother/ sister, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother/ sister, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: whoever loves God must also love his brother/ sister.' (1 John 4:20).

Conclusion

There are many commandments and canons. Let us leave them to the experts. First, we should experience God's Gospel, which comes with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. This Gospel brings to our lives that amazing realisation that, despite all our sinfulness, weakness and shortcomings, we are loved by God. Let us then love the Lord our God in return for his love and for all those wonderful things he has done for us. This genuine love of God will enable us to love our neighbours. Ages ago, a great Christian wrote this powerful statement: 'The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love' (Galatians 5:6). Let us put it into practice. Amen.

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.

New Life Asia Team