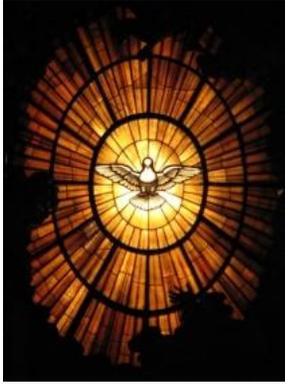


THE EUCHARIST AND THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS



Moses said to the people: “If only you would heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this book of the law.”

In the Old Testament there are 10 Commandments – one that is greatest – and 613 statutes. These establish God’s covenant.

613! I have difficulty remembering what I was supposed to pick up at the store.

In the New Testament the covenant is distilled down to 10 Commandments – two of which are the greatest – and, as we will learn later, one new commandment and eight Beatitudes. Theoretically this should be much easier to remember but I admit to the difficulty I have in remembering these. More specifically, to holding up my end of the covenant.

The two greatest commandments are: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” We hear this in today’s Gospel reading in the lawyer’s response to Jesus’s question.

I see myself in the lawyer for just as I too can recite the commandments and highlight the greatest two, I also need a robust reminder of what practicing these commandments looks like. And how often I need this reminder because these are something not to be committed to memory but etched on our hearts. I am not empathetic by nature so yes, there are times I had to “learn” to be compassionate, that is, remembering the appropriate response. But here is the secret I have learned: the Eucharist.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote that upon contemplating the Paschal Mystery in the Eucharist we are “drawn ‘into the very dynamic of his self-giving’ we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice” (Deus Caritas Est, #13).

Who is our neighbor? The members of our human family who face injustice.

Pope John Paul II wrote that the Eucharist “increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today.” Christ in the Eucharist calls us to build “a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God’s plan” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia #14).

Who is our neighbor? The world.

As Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict wrote that in the Eucharist, Christ unites me organically with every other person receiving him including the one next to me, whom I may not like very much” (Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity).

On a Sunday morning when I am a Eucharistic Minister I am struck by the love I have for every single person who steps before me. Any disagreement with or reflective dislike of someone before me immediately evaporates. These negative feelings do not return. I love each person.

How do I love my neighbor as myself? I can’t remember. I take comfort, however, that the answer is etched on my heart: it is forgiving and loving as I do through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

And that is my secret.

(Readings for Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time)



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace