

Love – the 'Bottom Line' of Faith

October 25, 2020, 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 22:34-40

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When Moses received the stone tablets containing the 10 Commandments from God, he didn't envision that by the time of Jesus [some 1200 years later] that these 10 commandments would have been expanded to 613 precepts. It's no wonder that even an expert and scholar of the Jewish Law would have lost sight of the essential purpose and intent of the Law and had to approach Jesus in order to regain a proper perspective. Even here, the question was intended to test Jesus by those religious authorities who themselves had grown out-of-touch with the Mosaic Law.

But even this vast expansion of the original Judaic Laws, pales in comparison to that within our own Catholic experience, wherein we have over 1730 Canons or rules governing everything from authority in the Church to rules about the sacraments, Liturgy and worship, the role of laity, religious orders, ordained ministry and many other areas of church life as well.

My own experience from my seminary days was a recollection of spending as much or even more time studying Canon Law than on the courses on scripture, theology and spiritual formation.

Having said that, I don't mean to disparage the need for guidance and directives in applying the teachings of the Gospel to practical, pastoral situations [which the intent of the Code]. Even Jesus himself said that not even the smallest part of the Law should be disregarded until the intent of all of it is fulfilled.

And what is that intent? Well, Jesus lays it out quite clearly in today's gospel reading: 'Loving God with all our being, and loving others as we love ourselves'.

However the mistake we often make is that we deify the laws but lose contact with the God Who is the Author behind them.

For example, the domestic rules of a family household become inhuman if children do not first experience the love that their parents have for them. Otherwise the parents simply become authority figures.

If our faith becomes only a matter of obeying religious rules so that we can get to heaven - how empty and sterile is that!

The lawyer who approached Jesus in today's gospel reading got lost in the rules as did those who had sent him to question Jesus. [He and they missed the forest for the trees].

Our relationship to God is not based solely on Church rules but on a foundation of love. And love cannot be ever fully defined in words. However, St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians [often read at weddings] does a pretty good job in describing some of love's characteristics. Love is patient; love is kind; it is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in

wrong doing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Love never ends. [1 Cor.13:1-8].

True obedience can never be based on reluctant compliance but rather on respect and a personal relationship with the one who has the given authority and responsibility of mentoring us. That's why Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians [Today's second reading] could say the Gospel was being spread so quickly because the Christian communities were actually living this kind of love - not just by word but by actual practice.

If that was true in Paul's day it is no less true for us in our day.

So when many things in life become complex and complicated, we need to get back to basics. That's where our prayer life is crucial. Seeking the kind of guidance and clarity of mind and heart wherein we rediscover the essence of God's love for us and that's the 'bottom line'!