

19. August 2022

The hierarchy of commandments

Mt 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'You must 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 resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

It is important to keep in mind the order of the commandments in regard to acting in accordance with this hierarchy. The first and most important of the commandments is to love God. This is the decisive factor for man to correspond to the fundamental order of his existence.

The fulfilment of the first commandment is the main mission in life, and only in eternity will it reach its fullness.

It is a commandment and not an option, by which the Lord implies that its fulfilment is indispensable for a life in accordance with the truth. The same is true of all the other commandments. It is true that man can abuse his freedom, breaking the commandments and acting contrary to them; but then he does not live in truth, but falls into darkness.

Today's Gospel makes us notice that the first commandment surpasses all the others in importance. Therefore the decisive question in our life is: How can I love God more? How can I better correspond to His infinite love? What must I do so that my whole heart, soul and mind belong to Him alone?

We can realise how essential these questions are, and, in the light of God, we must ask them again and again and examine our conscience. How easily we allow ourselves to be captivated by unimportant things and attach our hearts to transitory things! How easily

we allow disordered human relationships to become so important in our lives that they limit our surrender to God!

In addition to daily meditation on the Word of God, the reception of the sacraments and the keeping of the commandments, also in their spiritual sense, it is important to remain in an intimate dialogue with God. We can approach our heavenly Father without fear and ask Him: "Lord, how can I serve You better, how can I become a source of joy for You, and what pleases You most?"

Perhaps He will answer us like this: "What I want most of all is for you to trust me, so that you may know that you can always count on my love. My loving gaze is always on you, and this must be your security. If you knew how much I love you, you could simply abandon yourself in my arms, and you would understand better and better how I guide your life; you would know what is the mission you have to fulfil and you would understand how I can glorify myself in your life".

Our love for God has a responsive character; that is, it is a correspondence to the invitation of His love: "*We love, because He first loved us*" (1 Jn 4:19). Therefore, the first answer to the question of how we can love God more would be to immerse ourselves in the love of Jesus, allowing ourselves to be loved by Him. A key to this is the contemplation of the Cross of the Lord, where He gave His life for us. Even if our feelings do not light up and we have the impression that this meditation is not leading us to anything, we can simply thank the Lord for His love, for faith assures us that this was His motivation. Frequent communion at Holy Mass, followed by true thanksgiving, is also a way of melting the ice around our hearts.

Let us also try to embrace our life with gratitude, seeing it from God's perspective. Through gratitude, we will be able to notice more and more clearly His love in everything.

Finally, we can turn to the Holy Spirit in this process of discovering God's love more and more, asking Him to remove everything that still prevents us from accepting this love. The prerequisite for this is the serious decision to be truly willing to get rid of everything that still limits the surrender of our heart, our soul and our mind. Then God will lead us on a path that will make us grow in love day by day.

As we strive to fulfil this first commandment to love God above all things, we also meet our neighbour, whom we learn to love with the same love of God. In order to be able to love one's neighbour as oneself and thus fulfil the second commandment of which the Lord speaks to us, human love will not suffice. It is divine love that teaches us to love our neighbour as the image of God, far beyond emotional affection, sympathy or antipathy. On our way of following Christ, this divine love permeates us more and more and also integrates our human love, once it has been purified. Divine love teaches us to love our neighbour in God! In this way we will be able to fulfil the two most important commandments, on which the whole Law and the Prophets depend.