

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 14:23

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we
will come to him.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 22:34-40; L148A

When the Pharisees heard
that Jesus had silenced
the Sadducees,
they gathered together, and
one of them,
a scholar of the law, tested
him by asking,
“Teacher, which
commandment in the
law is the greatest?”

He said to him,

“You shall 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 is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as
yourself.

The whole law and the prophets
depend on these two
commandments.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

There’s a Texas saying, “When you boil the pot dry,” meant to refer to what’s left after all else goes away. For example, “When you boil the pot dry, it was a misunderstanding that caused all the fuss.” It’s akin to getting to the gist of the matter, without superfluous details. “What’s the bottom line?” is another expression that captures the sentiment.

In Jesus’ day—when over 600 particular laws made up the totality of Mosaic Law, and a violation of one effectively meant a violation of the totality—the

question posed to Jesus is seen as reasonable. Moreover, in the context of the larger story, Jesus had bested the chief priests, elders, disciples of the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees; and now the Pharisees themselves are ready to take another turn. One of their number, a scholar of the law, becomes their mouthpiece. We should keep in mind that though the question seems perfectly legitimate on its face, the scholar was asking Jesus in order to test him.

That test doesn’t seem to bother Jesus, who responds by quoting Mosaic Law, first Deuteronomy 6:5 followed by Leviticus 19:18. It’s quite likely that Jesus himself was the first to combine these two commandments. For him, and for his disciples, these two commandments are the foundation of the law and the prophets. It’s what we have when we boil the pot dry. It’s the bottom line.

When we love God and love our neighbor, we are fulfilling the law. All of the law, the entirety of the more than 600 particular laws, are summed

up in these two. For us today, we might think of something similar if one were to ask which is the most important teaching in the catechism, or which is the most important precept of the church. Perhaps a comparable question might be whether it is more important to tend to a sick relative or attend Mass? The answer sidesteps all these questions by saying the most important law is twofold: Love God and love your neighbor. With these as our guiding light, all else comes into focus.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Getting to the crux of the matter can be an important exercise. Pruning away extraneous detail to reveal the core issue is essential in many cases. For Christians, we recall that Jesus’ teachings were rooted in Mosaic Law and the prophets. Yet he emphasized or combined aspects of each that made them seem to come alive, or to be read and understood in a new way. It’s certainly true that loving God and loving one’s neighbor were commandments in Mosaic Law. But who had ever combined them like this before? Ultimately, it’s a good reminder of the core of the religious message. All of our actions ought to flow from this twofold love. Loving God and loving neighbor go together, and they cannot be reduced one to the other or one over the other. When we live by this guiding principle, we are living the paschal mystery.

