

Matthew 22:34-40^{v vi}

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 commandment in the law is the greatest?" 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 greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

^v About Matthew 22:34-40

Today's reading contains the third of the controversy stories that show Jesus' ability to confute his opponents. The law of Moses as set forth in the first five books of the Bible had, over the passage of centuries, been codified into 613 commandments. The question was often raised whether they were all of equal weight.

The first part of Jesus' answer quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, which began the Jewish morning prayer called the Shema (from the first word in the quote, "hear"). The inclusion of "mind" (v. 37) may be an alternate translation for Gentiles of "heart," which, in Jewish understanding, was the core of a person, the center of thought and will and emotion. The second part of Jesus' answer quotes Leviticus 19:18b.

The conjunction of the two Old Testament texts occurs, but infrequently, in rabbinical

writing. It may have been original with Jesus. Each commandment is to be understood in the light of the other. Paul quotes the second as the fulfillment of the law, an assertion echoed by other New Testament writers. Matthew has prepared for its importance by stressing it earlier (5:43-48; 19:16-19).

^{vi} **Reflection and Response**

Today's readings bring a dual message: in faith we are both challenged and affirmed. The first challenge comes from Leviticus. We are reminded that our lack of or limited compassion stands in stark contrast to the all-embracing compassion of God. We are called to be holy as God is holy, and that holiness is measured by how we love our neighbors as ourselves.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul discloses the humility of those who share the Gospel in honesty and gentleness. In this way, he affirms that the true followers of Christ disclose and exemplify the love God to one another, and the love that the Christian community is meant to share with all people.

Matthew's gospel reminds us that God is the only one who can ever satisfy all the longings of the human heart and soul. Even those who have trained the mind as a superb instrument recognize its limitations. In our quest for the divine, says theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, the surprise is that "we sought a God to love and were found by a God that loves us." It is from this love that our love for neighbor flows.