

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 22:34-46 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." ⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, ⁴⁴ "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" ⁴⁵ If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Given the opportunity, many people have a question or a list of questions they'd ask the Lord. Sometimes those questions would be to probe one of the mysteries of sacred Scripture, how Jesus can be fully God and fully man, how ordinary things like water, wine, or word can be the means through which God delivers his extraordinary forgiveness, or how there are three distinct Persons in the One Holy Trinity. Some questions might be genuine inquiries about God or His creation, like why evil exists, or why God let that happen. Some questions are evil, designed merely to taunt or to test God, like asking if He can make a rock bigger than He can lift. The Pharisees had such an opportunity, numerous opportunities, in fact, to ask God a question. Having witnessed Jesus dispatch their theological enemies the Sadducees, proving their disbelief in the Resurrection of the dead to be contrary to Scripture, the Pharisees have a go at asking Jesus a question. But their question is evil from the beginning, desiring to put Him to the test. Their question was about the Law, even though the Law had explicitly commanded, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

2 “Which is the greatest commandment?” they tested. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” It’s a summary of the 10 Commandments. “Love God” summarizes the first three commandments; “love your neighbor” takes care of the remaining seven.. Easy, you might suppose, to love God. But Jesus pairs the commandments together: the second is like it. “Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). If you do not love your neighbor, you do not love God, and you are no keeper of the Commandments.

3 The greater problem is not how poor you are at loving those around you, those you encounter in any given day in need of your mercy. The greater problem is how good you are at loving yourself. That’s the standard Jesus holds up for how you’re to love your neighbor. Don’t even think about egregious forms of self love, narcissistic hubris, vanity, pride. Those Jesus rebuked in last week’s reading. This week, he’s not rebuking pride. He’s rebuking how you love yourself far, far more than your neighbor. Don’t believe me? Think of all the things you’d do for yourself that you wouldn’t do for your neighbor. If you’re hungry, you’ll empty your 401k, sell a car, max out your credit cards in order to buy groceries, but if you merely empty your wallet for a hungry neighbor, you consider it a huge sacrifice. If your own family members end up in the hospital, you’ll spend hours—days, even—at their bedsides, but when a neighbor falls ill, you congratulate yourself for sending a card. You work long hours to secure a promotion or a raise for yourself, but would you work just as hard so your coworker could be promoted? You would stop at no end to keep yourself from harm, but would

you risk everything—even your own skin—to keep a neighbor from suffering harm?

Loving your neighbor is one thing. Loving him as much as you love yourself is another.

You can't even come close. The Law is impossible to fulfill.

4 And yet, all the Law and prophets hang on this: Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law hangs on your ability to love your neighbor as you love yourself, thereby demonstrating that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind. All the Law hangs on that; even a partial lack of love will brand you loveless. If even a portion of your heart, soul, or mind is withheld from the Lord, you don't love Him. If there is even one thing you would do for yourself but not for your neighbor, or have done for yourself but denied to your neighbor, you love neither neighbor nor Lord. You cannot break any commandment toward your neighbor without also breaking it toward the Lord, without also breaking the first commandment. The Law is impossible to fulfill. It's not given so that you may fulfill it, but so that you may know your inability to fulfill what it requires.

5 Their question answered, the Pharisees found themselves in the same boat as the Sadducees: silenced by Jesus' answer. The Law does that: stops mouths, leaves you without an answer, without an excuse. Then the silence was broken by another question, this time not by the Pharisees but by Jesus. And this is not a question of the Law but of the Gospel. "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?" On this question hang all the Law and Prophets. The Pharisees had their answer: "David's son." As Scripture promised, the Messiah would be a descendant of David. But they also knew the One asking the question to be a descendant of David. His Virgin Mother was a direct descendant of David; so, for that matter, was the man who raised Him as

His father, Joseph. But their answer is incomplete. No mere son of David can be the Christ, promised to deliver His people from their bondage to sin and death. "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?"

6 The Christ is also David's Lord. The Descendant of David, the One born of woman, is also the Lord God. The Son of Mary is the Son of God. All the Law and Prophets hang on this: He came to fulfill the Law for you, in your place. "You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14). All the Law and Prophets, with their accusation, the truth they know about you, all their crushing weight, hang upon Him. And with Jesus were nailed to the cross. On the cross, Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God fulfilled these two commandments perfectly. His love for God is what brought about His obedience to His Father. And His perfect love for you, His neighbor, is what led Him to die in your place. "This is how we know what love is; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

7 All His enemies have been put under His feet. Below the feet of Jesus, hung on the cross to die, flow blood and water from His pierced side. Under the feet of Jesus, His enemies become His neighbors. The lawless become the righteous. The blood and water that flowed, that marked His death, flow to you and mark your life. They give you life. From the water of the font, you have been given new life, Jesus' life, joined into

both His death and His resurrection. And from the chalice, you drink the blood He shed to forgive your sins, the Blood that today delivers to you that forgiveness. You are not saved by your answer to the question what is the greatest commandment? You broke them all. You are saved by the answer to the second question: Who is the Christ?

David's Son, the Son of God, is your Savior. His love for you is perfect.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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