

Our Gospel for today features the Word of God himself telling us what stands at the heart of the law. A scribe posed, as a kind of game, the following question: “Which commandment is the greatest?” There were hundreds of laws in the Jewish system. So, it was a favorite exercise of the rabbis to seek out the single rule that somehow clarified the whole of the law.

Then Jesus gives his famous answer: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” What does that mean? The law is finally about love, and the love of God and neighbor are inextricably bound to one another. If we love God, but hate our neighbors, we’re wasting our time.

Why are the two loves so tightly connected? Because of who Jesus is. Jesus is not just a human being, and he is not just God. He is the God-man, the one in whom divinity and humanity come together. Therefore, it’s impossible to love him as God without loving the humanity that he’s created and embraced.

The dual nature of love is a theme we see beautifully expressed in today’s reading from Tobit. Since Monday, we have been hearing the life of Tobit unfold. Through much pain and hardship, he has been living in Exile in Assyria since the age of 20. Now, decades later, in his late sixties, things are looking more hopeful. Tobit has regained his sight after years of complete blindness as he sends his son Tobias to the home of Raguel.

We read today of Tobias’ introduction to Sarah and her family. As the reading reaches its climax we see expressed by Tobias the dual love of God and neighbour. He exalts the faithfulness of God as he declares:

***“Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors,
and blessed is your name in all generations forever.
Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever.***

What is so telling about this prayer is how Tobias’ love for God is central to his life. All the hardships he has known have not left him cynical and distant from God. Rather, he affirms God’s providential goodness with whole hearted conviction. He then focuses on the providential plan of God in forming Man and Woman in His image as he prays:

***You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve
as a helper and support.
From the two of them the human race has sprung.
You said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone;
let us make a helper for him like himself.’***

Remember Sarah had been married seven times and yet here she is ready to enter for an eighth time into marriage because she is still able to see the place of marriage within the greater purposes of God. Here are people who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

But listen then to Tobias' expression of love he directs towards Sarah:

***I now am taking this kinswoman of mine,
not because of lust,
but with sincerity.
Grant that she and I may find mercy
and that we may grow old together."***

What are wonderful prayer where we see into the motives of Tobias. He understands that marriage is about a relationship where sincere love allows for an experience of God's mercy extended one to another in a life long relationship where they may grow old together.

The name Tobit means "A Good Man". The name Tobias means "The Lord is Good". We see in this story how people who know the goodness of the Lord show their goodness by genuinely loving the people in their lives.

May we be inspired by the Book of Tobit to reflect on these ancient people whose lives were marked by such authentic faith, where love for God and neighbour was an expression of the Great Commandment enunciated by our Lord in today's Gospel.