



STORIES AND REFLECTIONS ON THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

In today's gospel, a scholar of the law tries to trap Jesus by asking him which commandment in the law is the greatest. Remember, in addition to the Ten Commandments, the Jews over the centuries added another 613 laws (their commentary on the Ten Commandments). If Jesus identified one law or group of laws as more important than the others, he would have pleased one group and alienated other groups—thereby falling into the lawyer's trap. Instead of identifying one commandment as being the most important ONE, Jesus offers a "summary statement" of the whole Torah.

Jesus told his audience that the greatest Commandment was to love God with all of one's being—mind, heart and soul and to love one's neighbor as one loves oneself.

Stories and reflections on the *Great Commandment*.

A young boy declared to his friends that he loved his mother with all his strength. When he was asked to explain what he meant by "with all his strength," he happily replied: "You see, we live in a fourth floor apartment and our building has no elevator. The coal for heating is kept in the cellar and since my mother is busy all the time and she isn't very strong, I see to it that the coal bin is never empty. I lug the coal up four flights of stairs by myself and it's not an easy job. Now, isn't that loving my mother with all my strength.?" (Share this story with your children and grandchildren).

This young boy understood the lesson that is offered to the gathered assembly in this week's scriptural readings, namely: *that love must be lived*. To merely speak of love or to simply feel love is not sufficient; if love is to be authentic, it must be lived, and lived with all our strength.

In today's second reading, Paul's praise of the Thessalonian church bears witness to their commitment to Christ. Their love of God and each other was contagious. Consequently, many others were drawn to God through them. Approximately eighty years after Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, Aristides, an Athenian philosopher and Christian

apologist included the following description of the church in a letter to Emperor Hadrian"

"They love one another.
They never fail to help widows;
they save orphans from those who would hurt them.
If they have something,
they give freely to the person who has nothing;
if they see a stranger, they take him home,
and are happy, as though he were a real brother.
They don't consider themselves brothers
in the usual sense, but brothers instead
through the Spirit in God."

The Story of "Wild Bill's" Decision to Love

There is a story told of a man who was liberated from a concentration camp in World War II. He was called "*Wild Bill Cody*." He was called that name because he had an unpronounceable seven-syllable Polish name and a handlebar mustache like the ones worn by western heroes in the old days.

While the rest of the Jewish prisoners were emaciated and haggard, "*Wild Bill*" was in excellent condition. Because of his amazing good health, the Americans assumed that he had been imprisoned a very short time. When his papers came through, however, they showed that "*Wild Bill*" had lived on a starvation diet and slept in airless disease-ridden barracks for six years just like the rest of the prisoners at Wuppetal. But "*Wild Bill*" had done it without physical or mental deterioration.

"*Wild Bill*" reported that he had lived in the Jewish section of Warsaw. He was an attorney with a wife, two daughters, and three little boys. When the Germans came into Warsaw they stood "*Wild Bill's*" family against a wall and opened up with machine guns. "*Wild Bill*" said he begged to be allowed to die with his wife and children, but because he spoke German the Nazis wanted him as an interpreter.

"*Wild Bill*" made a decision. He said, "It would have been easy to blame the soldiers who had killed my family, but in my practice I had seen too often what hate could do to people's minds and bodies. Hate had just killed the six people I loved most in the world. *I decided then and there that I would spend the rest of my life - whether it was a few days or many years - loving every person I came in contact with.*"

The decision to love every person - was the power that kept "Wild Bill" alive and well in the face of every privation the Nazis could engineer. He became self-reliant. He was able to make that decision because he realized that he was able to choose his own feelings. No law dictated that he had to hate the Nazis. He knew he was free to make another choice. By choosing to love instead of hate, one man salvaged both his mind and his body from the Holocaust.

"Wild Bill" was aware of the grace within. He stayed awake to the Spirit which lives within. When we are not awake to our inner divinity, we do what is pragmatic and best for ourselves.

If in Customer Service Take Note

A major hotel chain was doing extensive testing of its customers' satisfaction with the hotel. Repeatedly, one particular hotel in the chain scored highest. Upon further investigation they discovered that the employees who dealt with the customers rarely consulted the extensive manual on customer service procedures. As one happy employee put it, "Our boss just told us to listen to the customers and treat them like we would want to be treated."

Manuals have their place and can come in handy. But the most important consideration, whether in customer service or living out our faith, is a question of the heart. If our hearts are in the right place-loving God and loving our neighbors- we'll know just what to do.

In a real sense, all of us who belong to a Christian Community are in "customer service". **Every time we mix with the public we represent Jesus and his church.** If we treat others as we would want them to treat us they may wonder what church we belong to and consider joining us. If we treat others (especially in church) with indifference and coldness, they will surely have no desire to return. It is important for us to remember that every Sunday in church we may have visitors sitting near us wondering if ours is the church they would like to join.

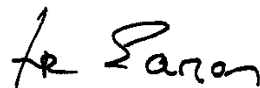
A Love That Does Justice

I met a community organizer at a number of meetings in the neighborhood. I liked her style, so one day I asked her how she had gotten into her profession. She spoke of her idealism in college, but that it was mostly talk and little action. A trip to India radicalized her as she experienced the sheer enormity of the poverty that she found all around her. So she decided when she came home that she would try to make a difference with her life by working for justice for the homeless, the elderly, and the poor.

What made her different from the others with whom she worked was her ability to listen to people and to help them feel they were all that was important to her at that moment. She never spoke to me of her religious beliefs, but she clearly exhibited a genuine faith, a gospel faith put into action.

The world in which we live is political, like it or not. The politics she practiced was based on a respect for the dignity of each person. We are called as Christians to share that same perspective, to see the dignity in everyone. But we are also called to take it a step further. We are called to love all others as our neighbors and in that way show our love for God. That is our political action. Justice flows from that love like a river through a canyon. (Fr. Dominic Grassi)

Have a blessed week,



Second collection for Peru

Last Sunday's second collection for Fr. Greg and his church in Peru came to \$15,000. We will add \$10,000 from parish tithe for a total of \$25,000. This should help him get off to a good start with his new church. The following is his letter of thanks to you the Ascension Parishioners.

Dear Parishioners of Ascension Parish,

How can I ever thank you for your generous solidarity with our "Lady of Lourdes" Parish in Pucallpa, Peru? Frankly, I feel overwhelmed with the large amount in the collection.

I promise all of you that we will use these funds in a creative and responsible way for the evangelization of our people; but more so, I promise to remember all of you in a special way in prayer, especially at our Sunday masses. You truly are a community which has responded to Pope Benedict's wish that "all the churches be for all the world" - the theme of this year's Mission Sunday statement.

May God bless you and reward you for your generosity and may He allow you to grow even stronger in your faith, bold in your hope, and generous in your charity.

I promise to keep in touch and let you know how our church building project is progressing.

Peace and blessings to all,
Fr. Greg Chisholm