

- Do you love me? Okay, what about Fr. John? Do you love him?
- How about this one, do you love God? A bit easier to say yes to that. A no brainer? Is this some kind of trick question?
- In today's gospel, the Pharisees are once again trying to trick Jesus, or trip him up with his own words, so that they could justify giving him a fair trial followed by a first class execution.
- But Jesus knows what they are up to and, as usual, he is ready for them.
- He uses their own words to answer them. That is to say, Jesus is not saying anything new with the two commands to love God with your whole heart, mind, and soul and to love your neighbor as yourself. Both had been said earlier by Jewish scholars.
- ~~So~~, not only are these both really good points to make about theology, but they are things that the Pharisees themselves would agree with; ~~so~~ not much to go after Jesus with here.
- But Christ is always two steps ahead of the competition. Without the Pharisees knowing it, He is in fact suggesting something new and radical.
- You cannot have one commandment without the other. Without the love of neighbor, the love of God remains a barren emotion; and without the love of God, love of neighbor is but a refined form of self-love.

- Love of God and neighbor are part of the same whole. This is a different proposition than considering the two commandments separately.
- Now ask yourself, do you love God? ~~Here we must~~ be careful. It is ~~all too~~ easy to fool ourselves. To answer this question requires deep internal introspection and, as always, brutal honesty.
- We as humans are naturally inclined to love ourselves. Perhaps you have heard this before. I do something nice for my neighbor not because I love them but because I love the way I feel when people acknowledge what a good person I am. *Or perhaps this...* I don't really love my spouse but I love how much money he makes or *I love how...* how I feel when people tell me how ~~lovely~~ *beautiful* she is. *do see if you are authentic...*
- Here is how to test yourself; ^{do see if you are authentic...} authentic love is always directed outward away from you and towards the other, not inward. If you love someone else you wish for their good, not yours. You act for their benefit without regard for any personal reward.
- Perhaps you are afraid to empty yourself because you don't want to be left with nothing. But God promises that if we all live in a loving way, others will provide all that we need and more because they love us. It is that easy and that hard to trust God.
- Now, do you love God? Are you expecting a reward from ~~some~~ *a* ~~big~~ Santa Claus in the sky, or do you love God simply because He loves you? Like any parent who loves their child, God loves you, *...for who you are.*

Yes, there will be good things given, but that is not what a parent's love consists of. A parent's love for a child wants what is best for the child, regardless of cost to the parent. The same can be said of God's love for you.

- Selfishness is an impediment from fully loving others and loving God.
- True love, devoid of personal gain, is an expression of the divine. When you love me ^{or a neighbor ...} you are loving God. And when you love God, ^{your neighbor,} you are loving ~~me~~. God is love.
- There is a quote from Les Miserables that says: "To love another person is to see the face of God." That's what Jesus is saying in today's gospel.
- Jesus is not simply answering a question – He is drawing a deep profound connection between two commandments. He is explaining that they are not just similar or merely connected, they are interconnected; symbiotic. One cannot thrive without the other.
- The act of loving itself is an act of worship; we are participating in the very being of God Himself.
- That is the key. That is the pathway to God. The question is not do you love me, but rather do you love at all. Jesus ^{is awaiting your} ~~really wants to~~ ^{answer.} ~~know.~~ He is waiting with the gift of His very self.