

A Reflection Matthew 22: 34-40

- If you were asked “Which of the Ten Commandments is the most important one? Pick just one.” What would your answer be?
- And once you answered, does it mean the others are not important? Carry less weight? Because you chose one, do you think it is ok to break the others once in a while?
- This was the trap being set for Jesus in the Gospel we just read.
- I’m a list person, are you? I have a list for chores around the house, a list of things to do at work, and the grocery list is on the fridge door.
- I think God knows people need lists to guide them. So God gave Moses a list to give to us. 10 things that would help us live good, happy lives. Of course we are talking about the Ten Commandments. In the Jewish religion they are called “The Law” or “Mosaic Law”.
- The problem was, the people that first received the Law didn’t *fully* understand why they were given this list. They saw it as simply a “to do list” Do this, don’t do that.
- To them the Law was just a contract, a deal with God: “ If I do this God, then God you must do that” “ If I do all 10 things God, then you must ... (fill in the blank).
- But Jesus’ teachings were challenging those beliefs. So the Pharisees (Jewish leaders) set a trap. They were looking, hoping Jesus would say something against the commandments. They were trying to prove Jesus had no authority as a teacher so they could condemn Him, get rid of Him.
- So they asked Jesus: Pick one, only one.
- But Jesus wouldn’t take the bait. Instead, He took the opportunity, the opportunity to show them there was

something more to the Law. Something they weren't seeing, something they weren't understanding.

- Jesus wanted the Pharisees (and each of us) to know: sure the Law was about the way they should act. But more importantly, it was about how they should *think* and *feel* : about God, about themselves and about others. The Law was really about the beliefs and values we must have in our hearts and souls.
- Jesus taught the Commandments (the LAW) are not about making deals with God, they are about loving God – being in a loving relationship with God.
- The Pharisees asked Jesus for the one most important commandment: Jesus gave them two.
- We call it God's Law of Love. It is a law written on the hearts of every person ever created (including you and me).
- It is a law that teaches us that Love of God, and Love of Neighbor are intimately connected. You cannot have one without the other.
- And Jesus tells us this “Law of Love”, these two commandments embrace all of the others. Every other law, each of the Ten Commandments point us to these two.
- Notice something important: this Law of Love calls us to three types of love: love of God; love of neighbor and love of self. Let's take a moment to consider each.
- Love of God: Sounds easy. We say our prayers, go to Mass, receive communion. But just as important as *doing* these things is the *reason why* we do these things.
- Jesus reminds us to love God means to look at our lives, our world and realize everything and everyone is a precious gift from God. We should always be amazed at God's great love for – and be deeply thankful.

- So thankful we make God and doing God's will the most important thing in our life – not because *we have to* but because *we want to*.
- Want to be close to God, want to see God's presence all around us.
- When we think and feel and believe in this way – we love God.
- The Law of Love also calls us to love of self. Jesus tells us to fully love God, to fully love others you must love yourself.
- This puts an important question in front of us: “Do I love myself?” The answer is not as easy as you might think. We can be our own toughest critic because we know better than anyone our weaknesses and faults. So what does it mean to love yourself? Several things.
- We need to take care of our minds and bodies of course. Eat right, exercise, study things, get enough rest.
- But we also must truly *believe* we are special, precious to God. We need to remind ourselves God cares for us; God thinks about us, God is in love with us!
- We need to see ourselves as sacred, a place where God dwells.
- We have to accept God's forgiveness when we make mistakes and forgive ourselves (much harder sometimes, yes?).
- We have to worry less and trust God more – this takes work for worriers like me!
- We have to realize we have great value in God's eyes and God counts on us to be His love in this world. Which leads to the *third* type of love we are called to.
- Love of Neighbor: Once Jesus was asked: “Who is my neighbor”. He answered: “Everyone!”.

- We are all members of God’s Kingdom. We are all in this world, at this time, together – and that makes us neighbors.
- Jesus reminds us we must love each person (those far off and those very close) the way God loves us, the way we would like to be treated.
- We start by seeing God’s presence in others, realizing God made them too and loves them dearly.
- We can allow ourselves to care deeply for others and for their needs. We can see every gift we have been given by God - as a gift to share.
- For those neighbors far off – we can pray for them, give to charities that will help them in their need.
- For those neighbors nearer to us we can add to that list being gentle, respectful, helpful, encouraging.
- And for those neighbors nearest to us (family, friends) the list grows even further. We can be quick to forgive, first to apologize, last to judge and criticize.
- When we think and feel; believe and act in these ways: we love our neighbors as ourselves.
- Living out this Law of Love takes work. It can be difficult at times. The good news is we have help. We have Jesus as our example: we look to His words, His actions. And we receive His presence in the Holy Eucharist to strengthen us.
- My patron saint, Saint Therese (the Little Flower) has these words of advice for us on living out God’s Law of Love. She wrote: “With every person you encounter, in every place you find yourself, in each situation whether difficult or pleasant remember to ask yourself: What would love require me to do?”