

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

When we buy an appliance or a cell phone or some other household item, there is usually an owner's manual, right? or at least assembly instructions, often in several languages.

Depending on what has been purchased, this printed material can be quite lengthy. One thing that is quite helpful is if the manufacturer has provided a "quick start" guide, usually no more than a page or two, that sums up and presents the most important information, so that we don't get lost in the details and can get the thing up and running right away.

The Jews of Jesus' day often struggled with the complexity of the Law that had been handed down to them. Scripture scholars have counted 613 individual instructions in the Law of Moses and it was very difficult for the normal Jew to know how to keep them all.

They needed a summary of the law that they could remember and which would provide a guide for understanding all the other laws and how to apply them.

Most of the scholars of the law had an opinion as to what law should be used as a summary, and were willing to argue with anyone who thought differently.

The question "Which commandment of the law is

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the greatest?” was important, and any teacher would be judged by how he answered it. Jesus’ answer was to put two laws together: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” comes first. It is the greatest commandment.

But then Jesus adds to it the second part of his answer: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The second part is really the test for whether the first part is being done.

Since God has created the world and us out of love and with a particular intention—that we all arrive at the kingdom of God together and that no one gets left out in the process—we can’t ignore the fact that we are part of this created world God has created, and are given the responsibility to foster its journey on the way to kingdom God has prepared for it.

This understanding is already present in the book of Exodus, which contains the original Law of Moses. Even there God lets it be known that love of God cannot be divorced from being concerned for the needs of those around us, especially those who are most vulnerable.

In Moses’ day the alien, the widow and the orphan were the most obvious examples of people who needed the help and support of others. In that society, they were the most vulnerable, the ones

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most likely not to get what they needed to live the life God had in store for them because they did not have access to the normal structures of family and kinship on which the society operated.

That list still applies today, although we might need to add some others to it who we now know are also vulnerable: babies in the womb, the victims of war, children who have been abused or trafficked or sold into slavery, abandoned elderly, those suffering from environmental disasters, entire ethnic groups who are being driven from their homes by brutal governments. There are others.

Oftentimes we are so confronted by the difficult demands of Jesus' second commandment that we seek refuge in trying to follow just the first. We put great emphasis on making sure God is honored by reverent actions and attention to the details of our devotional life.

But Jesus very explicitly tied love of God and love of neighbor together. Without the second, the first is empty.

It's worth noting that, in that first reading for today, it's clear that God is addressing the entire people, all together, rather than just individual members of the chosen people. Love of neighbor and care for the vulnerable in our midst is a responsibility God places on the entire community

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of Israel— individuals and the people all together.

Usually, our individual response takes the form of charity. We participate in clothing drives or the soup kitchen, or send money in for disaster relief. The response of the people altogether requires something beyond that , a commitment to social justice.

Even as we seek to meet the needs of those who are struggling, we answer the call to speak up for them in the halls of power, advocating that the structures of our society are conducive to their well-being. That comes with living in a democratic society.

That also is love of neighbor.

Reverence for God, charity and working for social justice for our neighbor—if we have built our response to God’s love on those things, we can be confident that we are on the right track and headed toward the kingdom of heaven.