

Gospel Verse
Sunday, October 26, 2008
(5:00 PM Mass)

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest.” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

■ **Mt. 22:36-40**

Since we got the big commandment tonight, we may as well ask the big questions – Do you really want to be happy? Do you want to live an absolutely wonderful full life? Do you want to have your life filled with utter and absolute meaning? Then, here's what you are to do – To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. The operative word there is 'all'. There are two other words there – not just the mind. God is not an insurance policy that we plug into to take care of our needs when we are in trouble. With all of our hearts, with all of our soul. I'm going to show you right now exactly how to do that.

Everybody sit up straight. Now - inhale it, hold it, exhale. Do it again – inhale, hold it, exhale. One more time – inhale, exhale. You've just not only increased your lung capacity, you have just increased your capacity to receive God. Do you get it? It's right there. And what you're doing to get is what you already have - the world's best kept secret. And one that you already know, but we don't know, is that God the Almighty, the Creator of the universe, the Everlasting – all those words -- God is as available to you as breathing. He is as close to you as your breath. As a matter of fact, without your breath there is no life and there is no life without God, and God will never, ever, ever, ever leave you. We cannot be separated from God. God is as available as breathing. That's the reason that the great spiritual masters are always trying to teach us how to breathe. To naturally breathe.

You can't cut yourself off from God no more than you can cut yourself off from your breath. But you can diminish your capacity to receive God. People in hell are still in communion with God, but their capacity has been so diminished that they are utterly unaware of the presence of God. And that's hell! They are so unaware of what God wishes to give them because they are so closed in on themselves and to themselves and held on to themselves that they are in hell. And, there a lot of people walking around on this Earth who seemingly have everything who are in hell because their capacity to receive what God wants to give is so small. God is in everywhere and God is in everything. If we were fully aware of that and acted upon that we would know the fullness of life and know the fullness of love.

There was a time that we did know that pretty easy. When we were little kids. I love seeing little children coming to church. They are the easiest group of people in the world to be close to God because they are right there. There's nothing blocking them. There is no mindset that separates them. But, as we begin to grow, as we become individuals, as individualization takes place we become very independent. When we start to compare ourselves, we begin to find that this is mine and you are there. I am here, and you are there. And pretty soon we find ourselves separate from God. Now all of a sudden God isn't in here in my breath, in my life, as close to me as I am to myself – God is out there. And the moment that God is out there, we think that he's got the goodies and we don't. And he's holding onto the goodies whatever they may be – health or wealth or good life or good family -- whatever it may be. He's got them all out there. And if we jump through enough hoops and really make him happy then he may share some with us.

So our faith, at that point, now becomes a moral imperator. We got to do all these things. And if we're really good little boys and girls and jump through all these hoops then maybe, maybe God will give us what we need. That God, that's a God that we were all taught. Myself included. That particular God who is out there is really hard to love. As a matter of fact, I don't think we love that God. I think we're afraid of

that God who's waiting for us to make a mistake, the first big mistake, and then cut ourselves off from him completely which cannot happen. So we make sacrifices to get God's attention. And what did Jesus say? I don't want your sacrifices. You don't have to make a sacrifice for me. I'm tired of all the hoops you jump through and tired of all the things that you're trying to do to make me happy. What I want is your heart. Go and learn the meaning of the words. Jesus says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

Today we celebrate Stewardship Sunday and it's all about mercy. And I simply want to talk about giving back after we have received. You see, everything is gift. There are certain things in life that are absolutely self-evident. We can't prove them. We don't need to prove them. All we need to do is think about them and spend some time.

Here's the first thing I want to think about. Who's life is it anyway? Did you create yourself? Of course not. Your very life is a gift. You did not know the day you were conceived, or the day that you were born or the day that you're going to be called home. And every moment in between you are being sustained by the gift of God. The parents that God gave you, the intellect that God gave to you, the talents that God gave to you, and they are gifts, were given freely without strings. No strings attached. God is giving the gift.

The question is what do we do with the response. If all is gift, how do we fit in? And this is what Stewardship is all about. We fit in by responding to the gift and the more we respond the more capable we are of receiving the gift. It's like this – the gift is all over the place. It's grace, goodness, life, abundance, it's all over the place. The more we are able to respond to that, participate and get involved in it, be aware of it, give back to it, the more we are going to receive. That's the law of spiritual life. God created you and loved you without your help – period. But, God will not justify you (that's a code word that Augusta uses and it means give you the fullness of life, give you the fullness of love)...God will not justify you without your help.

If we're going to grow in God, we have to cooperate with God's grace. How? By entering into relationship and participating in doing what God is doing. What's God doing? If we're going to enter into this we got to know what he's doing. What's he doing? He's giving. And what he's giving he's asking us to do the same. We must respond in kind. We must do our part. God's grace takes our cooperating. There are certain things we've got to do. We're like the man who really did love the Lord...

One day in a dream God came to him and said, 'Tomorrow you're going to win the lottery'. The man woke up ecstatic. He went and got the newspaper and he didn't see his number or his name in there. He didn't see that he won. He said, 'I thought you said I was going to win it?' The next week God did it again – still nothing there. The week after that, nothing here. And he said, 'I thought you said I was going to win the lottery. What's the matter with you God!' And he heard the voice of God come down from heaven and he said, 'Humor me...buy a ticket!'

You've got to cooperate. You've got to at least buy a ticket. You've got to at least get involved. And the more you buy a ticket and the more you get involved, the more you are able to give and the more you are able to receive. It's a spiritual law. Remember that saying – to those that have, more will be given and to those that do not have, little? It has nothing to do with God's gift. It has everything to do with our capacity to receive. And we are shrunken when we hold on and hoard. And when we are able to open up and give away we stretch our souls and our hearts and there's more room to get in. Just as nature pours forth, so does the love of God. And, as we pour forth all that we have are gifts of talent, time and treasure come back - they come back. They come back.

We've got to cooperate. We have no power to light up a room, but you can open the windows to let the light shine in. And if you shut your eyes to the sunlight, who's to blame that you cannot see? We complain that we are hungry but we've refused to open our mouth to get the food. We're in the dark, but there's light surrounding us. We need to do something. Throw the switch. **We throw the switch by giving back.** This is the new commandment – To love God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind. And that means what we receive is gift and what we give back is gift. And we open up the

flood gates and more gift keep on coming in. The gift makes everything flow. But we have so little capacity for it. When we use our gifts, we increase our capacity. The more we give, the more we receive.

I was in Denver this last week. My older grandchildren asked me to watch two movies with them. It was very interesting. The first was a remake of the Shirley Temple movie *The Little Princess*. And you know the story of the girl who goes to the boarding school and her father has to go off to war. She's the rich little girl, and then they think her father is dead in the war. And all of a sudden she's a poor little girl and she has nothing. They are treating her like trash. And she finds herself outside one day. And somebody gives her a coin. With the coin she buys a beautiful sweet loaf of bread. And she is about to taste this wonderful sweet bread and she sees little beggar children across the way who are starving. She takes the bread that was going to feed her and she gives it away. Of course, we know how the story ends. Her father comes back. He's healed. He calls her by name. And everything she ever dreamed of is coming back a hundred-fold. A hundred-fold.

The other movie my grandchildren asked me to watch with them was the biography of St. Vincent DePaul. It was the old French biography with subtitles and the whole thing. And, of course, you know the story of St. Vincent DePaul. As a matter of fact, there's probably very few parishes who have a more active St. Vincent DePaul organization than Mary Queen of Heaven. And what was Vincent's life? Vincent's whole life was to say, 'If I had a whole loaf of bread, what do I do?' 'I take half of it and feed it to the poor and I take the other half and I buy (inaudible) to feed my soul.' And the more that Vincent gave, the more he received. The more he gave, the more it came back. That's what God calls us to do. And that's what we will do as a parish.

As a matter of fact, this year I have announced already to our administration, our finance committee and parish council, that when we have our annual fund drive for the auction dinner dance, all the funds are going to go to the poor. St. Vince DePaul, walk in ministry – they are going to go to their needs because we cannot, we will not, have to have fund raisers to pay for electricity for this church. If we can't keep this church open, lit and maintained on what we put in on a Sunday morning, I'm not quite sure we want to be the church we are, if we are the church we are. I don't doubt for a moment the least of our worries are going to be physical, once we understand what it means to receive and give back.

I was with my classmate the other day. He's got an old man who comes to him quarterly. He's in a parish very similar to ours. It's a west-suburban parish. It's in a community very similar to ours. And every three months an old man comes and gives him a stock certificate worth anywhere from \$100,000 to \$300,000. Every three months. And he's not a parishioner. He likes the way this weekend priest preaches. I should have such a weekend priest. And, finally, father stopped him and he said, how do you do this? The old man said I do this because when I first began, and I began with nothing before I had my company, my corporation (which I've finally sold and now I'm doing what I'm supposed to do), I began by giving. I took my 10% and I gave back when I had nothing to give. I gave 10% of my nothing. But it kept on growing and growing and growing. And the more it grew, the more I gave. And the more I gave, the more it grew. I believe in this. I have no doubt in my mind. I believe in this. And today he's a rich man who will never go poor because he does it with all of his heart, all of his soul and all of his mind.

Now this man has the gift of generosity. And it really is a gift. Some people in this church right now have an incredible gift of generosity. It's no big deal. It's no big deal to give back. Some of us...and I include myself in that...I'm a post-depression baby and we get pretty fear-based sometimes, especially when it comes to material things. And when people are afraid of loosing material things, we want to hold on to them. Some of us need to be awakened. Well, this I the wake up call. This is the wake up call. God has given us incredible gifts. For the gifts to grow, they've got to be used – given away – of our time, of our talent, of our treasure.

We have received everything, everything. And I can prove it to you – Inhale. It's now time to exhale.