

Archbishop Lori's Homily - IVE Mass

Friday, 3rd Week of Lent

IVE Mass

St. John the Baptist de la Salle Parish, Chillum, Maryland

Mar. 9, 2018

...speaking of “elevator speeches”, today’s Gospel reading from Saint Mary provides us with Jesus’ “elevator speech”. Asked by a sincere Scribe which are the most important of the commandments, Jesus responds succinctly and accurately: “The first is this: Hear O Israel! The Lord is God alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

In less than a minute, Jesus cut to the chase, the core of the Law, the Torah, with its 613 prescriptions – with all its laws, rules, and regulations. The Lord not only summed them up but he was also the first to link so clearly love of God and love of neighbor. In doing so, Jesus waded into the midst of endless rabbinic debates and with only a few words he, as no other, illuminated the Law and the Prophets. Would that our “elevator speeches” be half as effective!

Let me suggest that you shamelessly steal Jesus’ “elevator speech” so as to make of it an *apologia*, a truthful and loving explanation and witness, for your vocation to consecrated life, the way of life, to which you, as members of the family of the Incarnate Word have been called. (This is in addition to the “elevator speech” on atheism you are preparing).

If I may say so, Jesus’ first commandment – while meant for everyone – corresponds to the consecration you are living as members of your religious family, a graced and total gift of self to God who loved us first and best (See Rom. 5:5,8, 1 John 4:11). Your consecration is expressed, of course, in your life of prayer and in your evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, a way of life drawn

from the heart of the Gospel and life of the Risen Savior. And so, when you heard Jesus say that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, did you not hear in those words an affirmation of your calling? And, as you listened to the Lord's words, did they not take you to the source of your consecration? - Namely: The One God of the whole universe, who creates and sustains all things by his goodness, power, and love; the God whose claim on us is therefore total. Yes, only because he loved us first can we respond to him with a total gift of self.

So we are to love God with all our heart, from the inner depth of an undivided heart, the wellspring of a heart that prefers nothing to the love of God, a heart attuned more and more closely to the saving will of the Father, a heart that strives to see as God sees, a heart that manifests itself in the way we live and love and serve.

So too, we are to love God with all our soul, that is, with the entirety of ourselves as living, breathing human beings, offering to God with sacrifice of bodily purity, giving up to God our very human desire to grasp and to possess, surrendering our will, our desire to be autonomous, self-directed, independent, asking that we might use our strength and talents for others so as to become 'an everlasting gift to the Father.'

And yes, we are to love God with all our mind, turning our thoughts away from all that is impure, cynical, uncharitable, turning our thoughts to what is above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, preferring, not to our will, but his, focusing our thoughts on his mission so as to focus our energies on his mission.

So too we are to love the Lord with all our strength, with every ounce of energy, with all our talent, our time, our personal resources - dedicating ourselves to some particular form of service in which we express our love for God and for the Church by ministering to the needs of others.

If the first and greatest commandment corresponds to your consecration, the second command, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" corresponds to the requirements of community life. Here the Lord sets a very high standard for he is telling me and you, all of us really, to have as much regard for the welfare of our neighbor as we have for ourselves.

How, then, does this apply to community life, to fraternal life in common? It means

'being subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21), and doing so in the rough and tumble of daily existence: living in close quarters with those not necessarily of your choosing, engaging with them in apostolates that also may not be of your preference. This sort of deference, this sort of concern for the welfare of your fellow religious, rules out every sort of disordered love of self, for when we are too focused on ourselves and our own needs and wants, we harm our neighbors in religious life and we harm the whole community.

Rather, fraternal life in common calls for a generous and forgiving love. It demands that we forgive in the measure we would like to be forgiven. It demands that we place ourselves at one another's service in the measure that we ourselves would like to be supported. It demands that we link our relationship to God with our relationship to our neighbor, and in the asceticism which this requires of us, to offer God a worthy sacrifice of praise.

When the Scribe understood and accepted Jesus' reply to his question about which is the greatest commandment, and when he proceeded to offer insight into Jesus' teaching, the Lord responded by saying to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." What encouragement! How we long to hear the Lord say this to us.

But let's take a second look at what the Lord said to the Scribe. He said that the Scribe was *close* to the Kingdom but not yet *in* the Kingdom.

Jesus both affirmed the Scribe and also challenged him - even as in this Eucharistic Liturgy, he both affirms and challenges us to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of the Beatitudes - "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!" May this be our single focus as we move through Lent toward the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Then we shall ascend on high with the Risen and Exalted Lord to the very heights of heaven!

And may God bless us and keep us always in his love!