

23rd Sunday
9/4/2022

A NEW AND TRANSFORMED RELATIONSHIP

Unless you hate your father and mother. What's going on here? What about the Fourth Commandment, *Honor your father and mother*? Is Jesus doing away with that commandment? Well, no. Elsewhere, Jesus mentions the importance of this. Does God, who is love itself, want us to hate anyone? Of course not.

Have you ever said to someone, *I've told you a million times*? If you're 75 years old and you have told someone that fifteen times a day, every single day of your life, it wouldn't even be half a million. It's a hyperbole, an extreme exaggeration that makes a point. We might say I like pistachio ice cream but dislike rocky road. In this exaggeration, one would say I love pistachio and hate rocky road. Here hate doesn't mean despise but whom or what we prefer.

Jesus isn't telling us to hate but rather uses a hyperbole to make a point. The point Jesus makes is that the First Commandment, regarding the primacy of God, comes before the fourth commandment. Yes we are to love and honor our parents, our family and others but the greater loyalty always is to be to God. We are to love them in God.

For many of us, our family is where we first learn of God. Yet even today, for some people, maybe even for some people here now, following Christ has meant estrangement or even separation from family. And we all know the pain of someone in our extended family, if not our immediate family, of someone we love who no longer practices the faith. We don't intentionally disown our human relationships but reorient them in terms of our relationship with God.

In loving God, we can come to love people more, not less, and when we can love them in God, we love them better not worse. If we don't love people as God loves them, we can love wrongly. Simply put, Jesus tells us that God comes first.

As it is with people, so it is with possessions: *Any of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.* Does that mean we all have to go home and have an estate sale this afternoon? Again, no. We don't have to go have an estate sale but we have to be ready to do so if necessary. Remember that sooner or later, everything you have, your house, your car, the money in your bank, the clothes on your back and your cherished family heirlooms will all belong to someone else.

God comes first, even before family members and even before our possessions. There is a temptation to let people take the place of the creator and also to let things take the place of the creator. When things are in the right order, we love others properly, in God and use things for the right reason rather than letting them become idols that take the place of God.

None of this is easy and Jesus knows that. Last week Jesus spoke of humility and generosity—being ready to take the last place and truly giving of ourselves. This week he gives us three conditions for following him. The first is to place God before people, even family relationships or one cannot be his disciple. The third is to place God before our possessions or one cannot be his disciple. And then between numbers one and three, Jesus speaks of carrying our cross and following him. Without that we cannot be his disciple.

You could say all this is the reverse side of the two greatest commandments: to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In other words, there's a cost to love. There's a cost to discipleship. People in love, whether spouses, parents, siblings or so many others, are ready to sacrifice for those they love. Strip away all the sentiment, as lovely as it truly is, and to say, *I love you*, is to say, *I am willing to suffer for you, to carry a cross for you.* The greatest example of this is Jesus on the cross, willing to suffer death for you, even death on a cross.

This is all similar to construction work. Make sure your foundation is solid and then you are free to build securely. To have things in right order, making Jesus our

foundation means that we can love others well and use possessions rightly realizing that we have, we are given to share with others to build up the common good.

Through Jesus, God has entered into a new relationship with humanity: first by Jesus' birth; then by Jesus' death and resurrection, by his Paschal Mystery, there is a new covenant, what we call a new and eternal covenant. We share in that death and resurrection, we enter into a new and transforming relationship with God through our baptism and through daily carrying our cross, not alone but with each other and with Jesus. We share in and renew that new and transforming relationship, that new and eternal covenant, with every celebration of the Eucharist. We offer all to God in a new and transformed relationship. A relationship of generous, humble, intentional living that flows from a life of intentional faith.