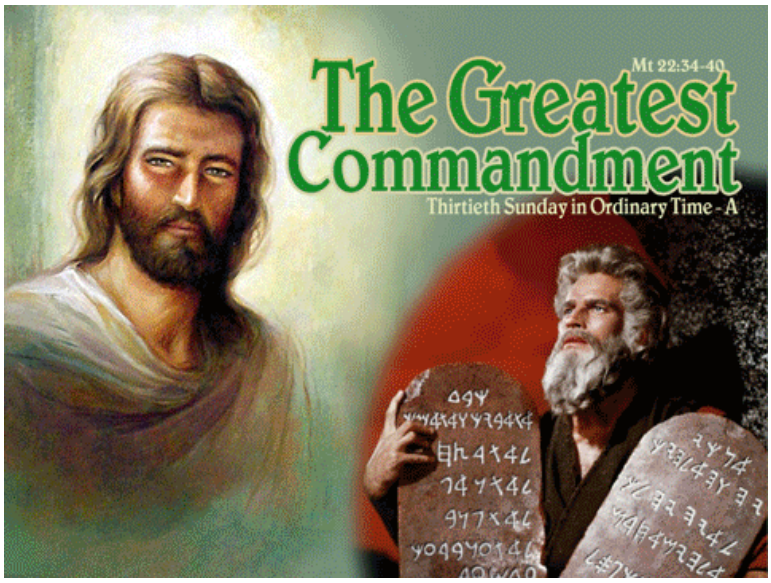
Homily for Sunday, October 25, 2026



Last Sunday's gospel story about the Roman coin and whether it was lawful to pay taxes started this way: ***The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said.*** In today's gospel passage, the Pharisees have cornered Jesus, and it says that ***one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.*** They are back to their old tricks. The Pharisees are not only morally corrupt, but they are also persistent. They want to hold Jesus to some kind of sin. But here's the problem—Jesus is the sinless One. There is no sin to hold him to. So, they have to set a trap, get him to fall into the trap, and then they will have something to hold against him. The Pharisees are very good at what they do; they're professional hypocrites. It's a full-time job with them.

The lawyer asks Jesus which single commandment in the Law is the greatest? Perhaps the lawyer, if we give him the benefit of the doubt, is trying to find his way through the 613 laws of his Jewish faith and wants to know what is essential in all of this. They can't all carry the same weight, can they? (By the way, as Roman Catholics, we do not have 613 laws but 1752!). If the Pharisee was genuinely interested in knowing what was essential to his faith, his question would have been a legitimate and honest one. The truth is, as the gospel tells us, it was simply to test Jesus. The question is not coming from a good space within the Pharisee. He's not genuinely seeking truth or clarity; he's just trying to trip up Jesus and embarrass him.

And you all know, probably by heart, Jesus' answer. ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."***

And because this is incomplete, Jesus adds, ***"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*** Love of God and love of neighbour are really two sides of the same coin, and we don't dare separate them. They are of equal weight. They are twins. This twinning, if we can call it that, is exemplified in the two tablets containing the 10 Commandments. There are those Commandments that deal with God and those that deal with neighbour.

In the first part of that dual command Jesus gives us, notice Jesus doesn't say, "You shall *believe* the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" but "You shall *love* the Lord your God…" Love of neighbour, incidentally, reappears frequently in the New Testament, and surprisingly there are few commands to love God. I think the reason is that loving our neighbour is intrinsically connected to loving God. Love of neighbour is, in fact, the only genuine litmus test there is that proves we any love of God at all.

I think that's what Jesus is getting at when he warns, "Anyone can say, 'Lord, Lord'". That takes not effort at all. "Only those who do the will of my Father's will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 7:21-23). Now *that* takes effort.

And in another place, speaking indirectly about love of God and love of neighbour Jesus says, "If you find yourself going to altar of the Lord, to offer your gift of love to God, and half-way up the aisle you remember a brother or sister that you are on the outs with, just leave your offering there. Go, first and be reconciled with your brother or sister, then come back and offer your gift to God." If I didn't know better, I would swear Jesus is actually putting love of neighbour ahead of love of God. He's not actually doing that, but he's saying that love of neighbour is inseparably connected to love of God.

Love of God can easily degenerate in pious prayer or be turned into something abstract. Yet, love that is not concrete—love of this particular person, in this concrete situation—is probably not love at all. My neighbour doesn't let me get away with abstractions of the mind like God does. It's easy for me to sit for an hour in front of the tabernacle and churn out loving thoughts toward God. What's much more difficult to do is for me to spend 10 minutes with someone who I find hard to love. Maybe that's why God had to become human—to teach us to love what is human.

Loving God is harder to get a grasp onto than loving neighbour. One reason is that God is a mystery and will always remain a mystery. Being such, it's hard to love what we do not know. I'm always asking myself, "Do I really love God?" It's hard to know. Loving neighbour, as I've said, helps me answer that question. But when the question persists, I say to myself, "Phil, love the things that God loves, then you'll know you are loving God."

Great. Now I just have to figure out *what* God loves. Although, the Bible emphasizes God's love for human being in particular, God's love is wider than that. The well-known quote, John 3:16, say, **"For God so loved the *world*…"** Not just "us," however large "us" may be: our particular group, Christians in general, or good people, or even all human beings. Rather, God so loved "the world."

What's it all about? What's the Christian life about? It's not about whittling God down to a set of laws. It's about loving God and loving what God loves.

Fr. Phil