**“Love God and Neighbor”**

There are a lot of things out there that promise to simplify our lives. Many of these items also claim to make us happier, more efficient, more productive members of society. Electronics are common offenders in this area. For example, the computer, it’s supposed to add hours to our day but often drains us as we try to keep up with waves of emails, Facebook friends, and word-processing. Something that was intended to help us often needs our help with frequent debugging, defragging, anti-virus updates, and spyware maintenance.

The same might be said of the smartphone. Touted as a mobile office, it rarely gives us more free time as we are beholden to every text, snapchat, email, and incoming phone calls.

**However, the strangest** claims of efficiency and simplicity can be found on tv, especially the shopping channel. My favorite is the ab-belt, a modern marvel of laziness and strange science. According to the commercial, this gizmo punishes the user’s stomach muscles by sending intense electrical signals throughout the stomach region. According to the commercials, you just strap this baby on and then do whatever you like, even watch a movie, as it sculpts your midsection into a perfectly defined 6 pack.

We humans desire simplicity; we crave it. We are constantly searching for that magical thing that will make our lives easier, happier, and more efficient. That’s why we fall for these products that so often promise to simplify our lives. These products rarely deliver on that pledge.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus does the very thing we are looking for. He simplifies the 613 laws of the Jewish faith into two basic commandments. “Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

You and I have heard these commandments since we were very little, so we might not think they are such a big deal. But think again about what Jesus just did. He gives the key to living the good life, a happy, wholesome, fulfilling life in terms of our relationship with God and with others, and does so in two commandments that are so simple that any young child can remember them. It doesn’t get much simpler than that. These two things are the very least we must do to be truly joyful in this life and forever happy with God in eternal life.

It seems too good to be true, too simple to work. Why would this be any different than the million other things that claim to simplify our lives, but then end up disappointing us? The answer of course is found in who it is that gives us these two great commandments. Jesus. Jesus is completely trustworthy; He is God, He does not lie. There is no gimmick involved, simply His desire to unite us with each other and our heavenly Father.

But I think it is important to make one clarification. Just because Jesus simplifies the whole moral code doesn’t mean that it suddenly becomes easy to carry out. In fact, its simplicity can make it more demanding! You see, the more complicated something is, the greater the chance for some leeway or loophole to exist. Just think of our nation’s tax laws. The simpler it becomes, the less wiggle room there is. What you see is what you get. The same is true of the two great commandments that Jesus gives us. He really means that we are to love God above all things with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. And he is dead serious when he says we must love our neighbor as our self.”

So, how do we apply this to ourselves? Consider some of the following examples:

When it comes to loving God above all things, do I love Him enough to get my family to Mass every weekend, even when we have 3 games, a late night or are out of town? Or is it always God who gets the short end of the stick? Do I give freely of my time and talent to God? Do I take some quality time each and every day to spend in prayer or does He simply get my left-over time?

How about loving our neighbor as our self? Do I have true respect for all others without exception? Am I kind in the way I talk about others, including those that are different than me or who drive me crazy? Am I patient with those I interact with, even when they are frustrating or downright rude? **Christ’s command to love did not have any exceptions.** Do I allow others to have their dignity? Do I give myself to others out of love instead of obligation? Do I further the social work of the Church by caring for the poor, the neglected, the sick and the unborn? Do I truly love my neighbor as myself, always and everywhere, or do I only do so when it is pleasant, beneficial to me, or fits into my schedule?

I have a good friend who over this past summer has helped friends and strangers alike pour over 1300 yards of concrete at their homes. This is not his fulltime job but something he does on the side. When it comes time to settle up for his work he simply changes the topic and quietly walks away. He refuses reimbursement for his efforts. If you ask him, he would tell you that he is working his way into heaven. He has been an inspiration to me about the way I need put into practice today’s Gospel. He does not refuse the payment for any other reason than he wishes to use the talents God has given him to better God’s kingdom. You see, we all have special talents or skills that we can use to build up God’s kingdom. My friend is using his skill of pouring concrete to make his neighbor’s life just a little better. He has a very simple outlook on his way to help his neighbor and still serve God.

The way we get to heaven is simply stated by Jesus in today’s Gospel: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

But it is not easy alone. We need God’s help every step of the way, through prayer, the sacraments, weekly Eucharist, and the teaching and support of His Church.

May we recommit ourselves today to the two great commandments and then trust that in keeping them, **we will find eternal happiness and life with the Lord.**