***31st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TME NOV. 3RD, 2024.***

When Jesus is asked by the scribe, “**which is the first of all the commandments?”** Jesus summarizes it down to what is the essence of religion- that is, not **law** and **ritual,** but rather that which is **interior**- namely, **a question of the heart.**

Jesus simplifies life - simply have two great loves and all the laws will automatically be fulfilled, namely love God and one another - period**.**

**You will notice –** the **First** is for us to love God above all else. Whyisthat the first? Because it is the love of God that motivates us to love one another. It is the love of God from which flows our ability to love our neighbor even when they are unlovable. Since love of human beings flows from love of God, it is a duty for us to explore how we can grow in loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Fr. Anothony De Mello gives us a helpful suggestion when he encourages us to change our concept of God. He invites us to picture God in our imaginations not as a God of judgment but rather as a “God of welcomes.”

He describes God getting excited like a child because you are coming to pray. With the imagination of a child, picture God having all these angels with golden trumpets. They are to get ready to welcome you.

Scripture informs us that God has first loved us with unconditional love and St. Paul tells us to make God’s love for us the foundation of our lives. Jesus repeatedly gives us reason to picture God as an all merciful, loving parent. He tells us that all heaven rejoices when one sinner repents, when the lost sheep is found. He tells us to call God, “Abba, Father.” It doesn’t get much more intimate than that. And if we are still in doubt, we should believe the parable of the prodigal son. The father welcomes him home with a banquet! And if nothing else it ought to fill our hearts with joyful hope, Jesus promises a thief on the cross next to Him paradise that very day. That is the way God is going to welcome us home.