Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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"Which is the first of all the commandments?" (Mark 12:28).

Tb 6:10-11; 7:1bcde, 9-17; 8:4-9a; *Mk 12:28-34*

What is the first commandment in your life? For some, the need for success drives every decision they make. For others, loyalty to family or group defines their daily actions. Or it may be personal honor or finding approval and avoiding rejection. This makes sense, for these basic commandments reveal the primal instinct to survive, to

compete, to win.

Jesus, as a faithful Jew, based his entire life and identity on the Great Commandment to love God first and foremost, mind, heart, soul and body, and then to love others as he loved himself. We might say that this was the only commandment he needed, for in keeping it he kept every other commandment. His life path was based on this simple but radical guide.

The scribe who questioned Jesus knew the prayer he was quoting. They were on common ground in the *Sh'ma,* said daily by all Jews: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord 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 this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The two men share joy in saying these words. Mark, the most compact of the four Gospels, shares this joy by repeating the words twice in his account.

Jesus' relationship with God and neighbor was at the heart of his preaching, his acts of healing and mercy - even the confrontation with official religion that led to his death on the cross. If we love, we will be just, compassionate and truthful. If we put God first, we will try not to compromise God's will for us as it unfolds in the circumstances of our lives, even if we must sacrifice other things for doing what is right before God and in all our human relationships.

Jesus lived in the peace and joy of obedience to the commandment of love. Discipleship is our school for learning how to do the same. It is no small challenge to place this commandment ahead of other, deeply imprinted and ego-centered instincts like survival, success, approval and loyalty. But, if we commit to this, we will know our true selves, formed in the image and likeness of God, who made us for love and to love.