

DEACON JOHN HALL'S HOMILY

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 25, 2020

Who is your NBA GOAT – GOAT: Greatest Of All Time. Is it Michael Jordan with the heart of the ultimate competitor that drove his unstoppable desire to win? Or Kareem Abdul Jabbar – the NBA's career statistical leader? Or LeBron James, who went from St Vincent–St. Mary Catholic High School straight to the NBA, third on the all-time points list and is still playing. Who is your NBA GOAT? Measuring the GOAT is not easy. But when it come the commandments – the GOAT – the Greatest Of All Time is today's gospel: Love God with all your heart, soul & mind . . . and love your neighbor as yourself.

Our first reading from Exodus goes back to the time when Moses was on Mt. Sinai and had just received the 10 commandments from God and now is receiving the Book of the Covenant . . . a practical application of God's laws to the lives of the Israelites. It covered situations like when someone steals an ox and sells it, he shall restore five oxen for the one ox. It prescribed the restitution cost to a person if their ox fell into an uncovered cistern of an irresponsible neighbor . . . and the Book of the Covenant even addressed generosity: For 6 years you may sow your land and gather its produce but the 7th year you shall let the land lie untilled that the poor may eat of it.

The Book of the Covenant like the Ten Commandments began by focusing on a person's relationship with God and what followed were the laws that governed the social conduct of a community of people . . . and how to repair social relationships when something or someone broke a relationship. And these are the laws to which the Pharisees are referring to when they challenge Jesus about the GOAT commandment

And without hesitation he answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with all your mind." Nothing earthshattering here, in fact his answer is part of the great Shema (sh'ma), a prayer that devout Jews recite every morning and night and it comes straight from the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt 6:5). This command to love God absolutely was to be "written on the heart" and drilled into the memory of every Jewish child. Mary and Joseph, we may suppose, did their job well.

The second part of his answer—"You must love your neighbor as yourself"—is taken from Leviticus (Lev 19:18). What might have raised some eyebrows is that Jesus puts both of these commands on equal footing.

The combined answer told the Pharisees that the entire will of God . . . and purpose of our life is to love God with our whole being and our neighbors as ourselves.

If you are like me, the older I get the more I understand that the love I have experienced throughout my life has made me who I am today. It was not money or luck or even me trying to pull myself up by my bootstraps, that gave me opportunities . . . it was because someone cared enough about me to show me the way. As a child and teen, my parents and others took an interest in me and my future. Someone encouraged me in my education, someone asked me or challenged me how I would serve God and someone even invited me to spend the rest of my life with them for which I am forever thankful . . . all acts of love.

For our young people who are preparing to start your Confirmation classes – I know these classes might seem like a lot of requirements or maybe you are thinking they are going to take so much of your time and they are going to be boring and you could be doing something way more fun. But perhaps you can look at the Sacrament of Confirmation as an act of love from the church because your church cares about you and loves you. As you are already finding out, life is not always going to be easy. But the one thing, the one thing you can always rely on is God and your faith.

And this year of 2020 continues to be a tremendous challenge – perhaps the greatest challenge in a lifetime for many of us. We are Christians – we are people of hope who believe all things are possible with God. We will not let the Coronavirus, the economy, even bipartisan politics control our lives. Even if we are people with a smile behind a mask and love in our eyes and we only fist bumps our friends . . . we can still love.

We are people of prayer and people of hope who will love God and love others . . . always.

May our hearts be moved to share the GOAT commandment with everyone we meet!