Our Gospel today is a deceptively simple one on the surface. Jesus is asked a straightforward question, to which He gives a straightforward answer: What is the greatest commandment? - to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind; and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Seems simple enough, right? Most likely…that is, until we recognize that our Lord is ***commanding*** us ***to love***…how exactly is that supposed to work? Can love be compelled? If compelled, is it really love? What about our free will? How can God require us to love Him - doesn't that negate the whole scheme He created…He wants His children to return His love of their own accord, right?

Answering these questions requires us to examine some basic truths about our own nature from a teleological perspective - meaning that we focus on the intended end, or purpose we were designed for. The Baltimore Catechism tells us that we were created to know, love and serve God. We know this definitively. Even before God revealed Himself to us through Abraham, mankind was continually reaching out to Him. Every single ancient civilization that we know of has left some

evidence of their attempt to search out and discover the divine. We know instinctively that a higher power exists, and we are designed to hunger for it…to understand it to the best of our ability. When we come to know God as He is - our loving Father - we can't help but love Him. In acknowledging His role in our life as the source from which all goodness, truth, and beauty flows, we recognize that we long for Him…that He is the ultimate satisfaction we crave…the infinite source to satiate our infinite hunger. What naturally follows knowing and loving God, is the irresistible urge to serve Him. This holy desire is essential; it is as necessary a conclusion to knowing and loving God as 4 is the result of adding 2 and 2. Knowing, Loving and Serving…Mind, Heart, and Soul…we are properly commanded to love in this way, because it is the very reason we exist…it is our most natural end…to enter into an intimate relationship with our Creator.

Now, what does this look like realistically? Let's examine each piece of the commandment in turn.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind." We can understand this command as a command to *know* God. How much do we really know about our Heavenly Father? Is our knowledge of God as deep and broad as we are capable of grasping, or are we content with being complacent…lukewarm…satisfied with a cursory understanding of the most important person in our life? Here's another way to ask the question - when was the last time we dedicated ourselves to learning about God? Do we read scripture of our own accord? How about the myriad of other mediums through which we have access to a greater knowledge of the Lord; we really have very little excuse anymore. From television programming and movies, to podcasts, radio shows, audiobooks, blogs, etc. etc. - there are so many ways for us to grow in our knowledge of God that we should all be qualified theologians.

"***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."*** This is clearly *loving* God. Do we love God? We have defined love before as willing the greatest possible good for the other, regardless of personal cost. Notice how applying this to God is perfectly reciprocal. God

needs nothing from us. There is only one way that we can fulfill this mandate, given what we know about Him. We know that He desires all mankind to be in intimate union with Him. If we do all we can to ensure that He realizes this highest good, then we ourselves are actually the beneficiaries of the blessing. Our presence with God in Heaven is not necessary for His continued being…but it is absolutely necessary for ours! So what, then, does this look like in practice? In what ways are we growing in love for God? What does our prayer life look like? Do we give God enough of our time in prayer, or are we doing the bare minimum? We all know what this looks like relative to our human relationships…we know the difference between spending time with someone because we feel a sense of obligation, versus spending time with someone we genuinely love and care about. Which dynamic more closely resembles the time we spend with Jesus? Do we love Him, or do we endure Him? Do we come to Mass with a longing in our hearts, or are we counting down the minutes until we receive Communion so we can rush out the door before the final blessing? Time is the true

currency of love. If we're not inclined to be with Jesus in this life, then we should really rethink our desire for Heaven.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your Soul." The soul - *Anima* in Latin - the base of the word 'animate'...to make to move…to drive…to put in motion…to *serve.* The soul for each of us is the moving principle…that which makes us act. Knowing and loving God is useless if we are not driven by that knowledge and love to action! Saint James said it best - "Faith without works is dead…Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you my faith." The tree is known by its fruit. Both our knowledge and love of God are made manifest through our good deeds. How often are we producing good fruit for the Lord? Do we give of ourselves often enough for the building up of God's Kingdom? When we see a need that we are capable of satisfying in our homes, in our places of business, our schools, or our parish community, do we make ourselves available with joy to do what needs to be done? "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison and not minister to your

needs?...Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."

It's no accident that the two commandments Jesus mentions are perfectly aligned with the two subheadings of the 10 Commandments. The first three of which deal with our relationship with God; the last seven cover our relationship with our fellow man. Know and love God first, then serve Him through others. The entirety of the law really is summed up in this passage. This should be something of a comfort to us. We may not be there just yet, but our goal is really quite simple. We should take this opportunity to renew our request to the Lord for His help in realizing our potential…to live according to the design of our very nature…to strive to know, love and serve Him each and every day, so that, having spent our life in the pursuit of God's will, we might claim the reward our Father has promised to those who love Him. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!