

In the introduction to his 1955 collection of essays titled, "No Man Is An Island," Fr. Thomas Merton speaks about two extremes that come about in our confused modern world. In it, he speaks of:

*the moral diseases we communicate to one another is society ... huddling together in the pale light of an insufficient answer to a question we are afraid to ask.*

In a sense, Merton distills in a prophetic way, the two sides of the coin in our contemporary moral conundrums. On one hand, an anxiety that everything is wrong; and on the other hand, a despair that everything is as good as it's going to get.

In today's Gospel, we hear that:

*One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,  
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"*

Perhaps another way of saying "first" would be "primary" or "principal" ... maybe even "foundational". In some texts, it is rendered as "greatest."

And indeed, the what Our Lord replies is certainly foundational.

*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 key here is that God alone is Lord. And we are to love God. And we are to love our neighbor.

This is the great *shema* prayer of the Torah, recited by all Jews daily.

And it is important that it reflects two continuing relationships: our relationship with God, and our relationship with each other.

We are never called to isolate ourselves. Rather, we are called to be in right relationship with God and with each other. This is the foundation of our lives ... this is the foundation of our faith.

The more we isolate ourselves, the more we neglect the relationships ... that we are compelled by the words of Christ ... to foster, grow, and develop ... in love.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray that we might heed this call - worship God alone ... and to love God and love our neighbor. Not in isolation ... but in community.