Thursday of the Ninth Week in OT
2 Tm 2:8-15, Mk 12:28-34

"How much is this going to cost?" I was standing at the top of a hill with my truck in the first cold autumn rain of the season. It was the busiest road in all of Steubenville, and despite the reputation of the University, just a couple of miles away, I was not impressed with the drivers.

People were honking. Gesturing. Yelling. It was the end of the lunch hour, and I was in the way.

My truck died. Just died. I tried to start it again, and it would stall. I figured if I could make it over the hill, I could coast down the other side and have a short walk to campus. Otherwise I was stuck. And I was cold. And I was wet. I was getting no love. And I was getting nowhere.

How much is this going to cost?

Is that what the scribe was thinking in the Gospel? When he asked, which is the first of all the commandments? Was he thinking Jesus was going to answer him with "thou shalt not kill" or "thou shalt not steal" or one of other the 10 commandments?

But Jesus comes back with a very simple formula: "LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR."

If we look at the reading from Saint Paul, we'll find what at first sounds like a series of equations:

If we have died with him
        (then) we shall also live with him;
if we persevere
        (then) we shall also reign with him.
…if we deny him
        (then) he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful
        (then) he remains faithful…

I know what you must be thinking – 'Oh no! I didn't think there'd be a math test at church this morning.' And it is too early for math. ☺ And actually, if you listen to this closely you'll see that there are parts of St. Paul's "equation" that just aren't 'equal.'

It makes sense that if we persevere, we shall reign – that sounds pretty good. King for a day? How about king for all eternity. And if we deny him, he will deny us. OK. But the first and last lines DON'T add up – if we have died with him, then we shall live with him. That makes sense to us as Christians. But what about if we are unfaithful, then he remains faithful. Wow.

It's all in the last part of this little equation from St. Paul: FOR HE CANNOT DENY HIMSELF. Why? Because GOD IS LOVE! GOD NEVER STOPS LOVING US!

So, God is not an equation. But, before you think that you're off the hook and there's no math test this morning – or worse, a math test at the Pearly Gates (can you see that? St. Peter saying, "Pencils down! Stop writing!") – GOD IS A RELATIONSHIP. It's too easy to reduce our relationship with God to a list of 'obligations' and other 'have to' things. I dunno, try that with your spouse! GOD IS NOT AN EQUATION. God is a relationship. The Trinity is a relationship.

And how much is this going to cost? EVERYTHING!