10.4.2026 Trinity 18 (Matthew 22:34-46)

The Old Testament book, Deuteronomy, records Moses giving a farewell address to the second generation of Israelites, those who grew up in the wilderness, as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. In this address, Moses repeated the commandments that were originally given to their rebellious parents, and as he did so, he said this about the words of God, he told them, *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates"* (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

It's been more than 3,400 years since Moses gave that farewell address, but if you approached a faithful Jewish home today, you'd find on their doorpost a mezuzah, a container which holds a small piece of parchment inscribed with the words of God. If you were to attend a traditional Jewish morning prayer service, you'd see men wearing small, beautifully crafted leather cases called tefillin, or phylacteries, which bind the words of God to their left arm and forehead, and among these words of God that the jewish faithful always keep on their doorposts, their bodies, and as frontlets between their eyes is the foundational truth of their faith, what Jesus designated as the first and great commandment, the Shema, *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Before he died at the edge of the Promised Land, Moses urged the children of Israel to plant the words of God in their hearts, to teach them to their children, to keep them always before their eyes, and the jewish faithful continue to do so. The first and great commandment is always in front of them, and the first and great commandment is always in front of us. At the beginning of every celebration of Holy Communion is the Summary of the Law, reminding us, through the command to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, that love of the One, True God is at the very foundation of the Christian faith.

In both the Old and the New Testament the first and great commandment is to love God with the entirety of our being, and in the Gospel passage we read this morning, after stating that truth, Jesus quoted another Old Testament commandment and raised it to the level of the first. Our Lord said this second commandment, *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"* (Leviticus 19:18) is like the first, and *"on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:40). Jesus equated the love of neighbor with the love of God, and told all who would listen that on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets, or in other words, everything God has taught His people by the Law given through Moses, and the entirety of what the prophets have spoken, all of this has been a Divine endeavor to lead us to love.

According to our Savior Christ, the words of God planted in our hearts, taught to our children, and continually kept before our eyes all boil down to love of God and love for one another, and Jesus not only summarized the words of God in that way, He perfectly fulfilled those commands, here, among us. Consider the way His love for the Father was revealed through obedience. Jesus said, *"I do exactly what the Father has commanded Me, so that the world may know that I love the Father"* (John 14:31). Consider the way His love for God the Father was revealed through humility. The letter to the Philippians describes the way our Lord, in humble obedience to the Father's will *"emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:7-8). Consider the way Jesus' love for the Father was revealed through the intimacy of their union. In the Gospels we find examples of our Lord, as St. Luke wrote, departing *"to the wilderness"* to pray (Luke 5:16), to commune with the Father in a relationship of interpersonal love that preceded creation, a Divine love that transcends the created limits of space, time, and matter.

The world has witnessed the way the Son loves the Father, and the sacrificial manner in which He loves us was physically manifested in this world from the moment He took on human flesh to the day He ascended to heaven. Think of how that truth is conveyed in the Litany. On the Sundays we pray through that historical liturgy, one of our repeated petitions is "Good Lord, deliver us," and as we pray we're reminded that deliverance came through every

sacrifice Jesus made for us, to use the words of the Litany, "by the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, By thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension..."

Our Lord delivered us by pouring out His life completely in an act of perfect love, revealing through obedience, humility, and sacrifice, His love for the Father, and for the world, and His Divine love is the Source, the well from which we draw our love for God and neighbor, and the example for all who will follow Him. The Law and the Prophets tell us to love, but the Son, through the Spirit, pours the love of God into our hearts and shows us how to open our hearts and allow His love to overflow into the world He died to save, and as we continue to consider our Gospel lesson, I would suggest that how well we follow the example of our Savior Christ depends on what we think of Him.

In the Gospel passage, after stating the twofold command to love God and love neighbor, Jesus asked the Pharisees, *"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions"* (Matthew 22:42-46).

This question baffled and silenced the Pharisees because of their mistaken view of the Christ. They expected the Promised Messiah to be only a man, a descendent of David who would live years after David's death, who would sit on David's throne and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. They easily understood how this descendent could be David's son, but the question of how David could call him Lord confounded them, because they were holding on to a view of Christ that wouldn't allow them to see that the Christ is David's son, who in flesh came after him, and David's Lord, who eternally precedes him, because the Christ is the Divine Son of God - David's Creator, David's Lord, and David's God.

What the Pharisees thought of the Christ left them confused and silenced, and what we think of Christ will either lead us to confusion and silence, or to love for God and neighbor. Think of Christ as just a good teacher, and you'll be confused by the thought that a good teacher would command a person to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48), or think of Christ as your buddy, and you'll wonder why your pal is calling you to lay down your life, to take up your cross daily, and follow Him (Luke 9:23), or think of Christ as a kind, inoffensive man who endorses every kind of lifestyle, belief, and behavior, and you'll be confounded by the first words Jesus spoke at the beginning of His public ministry in which He called us all to repentance. Rather than approve every lifestyle, belief, and behavior, Jesus said, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17).

The words of God, the Law and the Prophets, all boil down to the twofold command to love God and neighbor, and what we think of Christ will either lead to confusion and silence because of the difficulty and self-sacrifice required by this command, or our view of Christ will lead us to love. Therefore, by the grace of God, we must fix the entirety of our being, our hearts, souls, and minds on our Savior Christ as He has been revealed to the world, as He is described in the Creeds, as the Divine, Eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, our Lord, and the One, True God who not only commands us to love, but is Love (1 John 4:8), the Source, and the example of Divine love. May His words, the words of God, be planted in our hearts, taught to our children, and continually kept before our eyes as we strive to love God, and love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34).