



Things to Ponder

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If you love me...

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

“If you love me...” are the opening words Jesus addressed to his disciples at the Last Supper. Imagine you are saying these words to someone you love. How might you complete that sentence? “If you love me...buy me a new car?” Or, “Stop smoking and drinking?” What about, “Let’s get married” or “Don’t make me eat broccoli?” or “Turn off the TV and listen to me?”

Jesus completes this statement clearly and concisely, “Keep my commandments.” For Jesus proof positive of our love for him comes down (or up?) to this: “Keep my commandments.” Given the recent controversy over public display of the Ten Commandments, Jesus might quickly settle this problem. He would remind us that even though the original Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets, for us they should be inscribed indelibly in our hearts. They are not rigid rules we are obliged to obey, but ten practical ways for us to perform our privilege of loving God and one another.

Our love begins where the commandments begin—with the one and only God who is love and who loves the world so much that he sent his only Son Jesus, not to condemn us but to save us. The name of this loving God is so awesome, so holy that we dare not banter it about or use it to curse instead of bless. Would any use the name of a loved one irreverently or flippantly? Would we use that name to express anger and frustration instead of love? Of course not! If someone who loved you very much were to invite you to his house to share a meal of incomparable quality, would we see this invitation as an *obligation* or as *privilege*?

The rest of the commandments give us an agenda for loving one another. The one who loves his parents (and no parent is perfect) would not think of dishonoring them. The one who loves would not consider killing someone or committing adultery or stealing, lying or coveting what belongs to them. True lovers just don’t act this way.

With the Ten Commandments as the foundation of Jesus’ statement on the night before he died, Jesus gives his disciples both a review and a preview of their agenda. But he does more than enumerate the original Ten Commandments. He also speaks of his “*new* commandment.” He had just shocked and surprised the apostles by washing their feet, giving them a new model of the kind of humble, loving service of others that they are now to exercise. He tells them, “I give you a new commandment:

love one another as I have loved, and will love you forever.” In those three words, *love one another*, Jesus condenses all ten of the commandments into one. He could not have said it more clearly, more simply, or more emphatically than this: “Love one another.”

Our task is to keep, observe and exercise this new commandment. As John cautions us in one of his letters, “Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and in truth.” His excruciating death and his triumphant resurrection are the pledge of his immeasurable love for us. To his own love Jesus adds our love for one another.

Keeping Jesus’ new commandment means that we lose our orphan status, if we ever had it. No longer are we alone, forgotten, abandoned, deserted like a lonesome, forlorn, weebegone, unloved orphan. For we are indeed loved, loved beyond our wildest imagination. And if love begets love, then it the love that God has for us should spill over in so many ways in which we can fulfill the new commandment, “Love one another.”

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