

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Commandment and the Question

Missale Romanum 1962 · Proper of Time · 20 September 2026

A homily

Three questions are asked in today's Gospel, and the last of them is never answered. A doctor of the law asks the first, to test him: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" He is given an answer, and then a second answer he had not asked for. Our Lord asks the second himself: "What think you of Christ? Whose son is he?" That one the men who had come to trap him can answer, and they answer it rightly: "David's." So he asks the third. David, he says, calls the Christ his Lord, and says it in the Spirit: "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Saint Matthew closes the scene with a sentence almost painful to read aloud: "And no man was able to answer him a word: neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

Hold on to that silence. Everything else in this Mass is standing around it.

The first answer we think we already know by heart. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind." Three times, whole. Saint Augustine asks what that word is doing there three times over, and his answer is plain and uncomfortable. It means, he says, "that no part of our life is to be unoccupied, and to afford room, as it were, for the wish to enjoy some other object." He is not saying that we may love nothing else. He is saying that everything else has to be loved inside that love and carried along by it, the way one current carries whatever falls into it. There is no second channel. Whatever we insist on keeping out of that one current we are not really loving at all; we have only made a small god of it.

And then the second commandment, which nobody had asked for: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Why is it "like to this"? Saint John Chrysostom gives the reason in a line: "this makes the way for that, and by it is again established." The love of the neighbour opens the road to the love of God; and the love of God, in its turn, re-establishes the love of the neighbour. Each holds

the other up. The first commandment cannot be obeyed alone, in private, with the door shut.

Now the second question, which looks at first like a change of subject. We were speaking about love, and suddenly we are inside an old psalm about a throne and a footstool. To love God wholly, we must know whom we are loving. Christ's question leads us from David's son to David's Lord. He was leading them, Chrysostom says, "to confess Him also to be God."

Their answer was true and one step short. Saint Augustine, preaching on the very psalm our Lord quotes back at them, tells his own people that they must answer as those men answered — the Christ is David's son — and then he tells them not to remain where those men remained. In the form of God, he is David's Lord. Taking the form of a servant, he is David's son. That is the answer nobody in the Temple would give. And there is the reason the commandment and the question stand together in one Gospel. First we are told whom we must love with everything we have. Then we are shown who he is. The God of the great commandment has a face, and it is the face of the man asking the question.

Saint Paul, who writes as a prisoner, tells us what that love looks like when a great many people attempt it at once. It is not a feeling. It is a manner of life: "With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity. Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Notice the verb. He does not tell the Ephesians to make their unity. He tells them to keep it, because it has already been given to them: "One body and one Spirit: as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all." Seven times in three verses he says the word one, to a church he is urging not to come apart. The one God whom we are to love with an undivided heart has one body in this world, and we are looking at part of it.

“Supporting one another in charity” is not goodwill toward humanity in general. In every parish it has a name and a face: the person who talks too long after Mass, or the one who never talks at all; the one who was unfair to you and has never noticed; the one whose grief, or whose opinions, you can bear for about four minutes. That person is where the first commandment is actually being kept, or actually being refused. There is no other place for it to happen this week.

Which is why the Church, at the beginning of this Mass, does not command it of us. She asks for it: “Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord, that thy people may avoid all contagion of the devil: and with a clean heart follow thee, the only true God.” Kept clear of what corrupts us, and following God alone: that is the one current again, and no second channel. The prayer asks of God what the Gospel commands of us. The commandment comes to us as a command and goes back to God as a petition, because we cannot manufacture it ourselves.

And notice the tone in which this Mass asks. At the door it does not ask for justice. “Thou art just, O Lord: and thy judgment is right” — that much is confessed at once — and then: “Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy.” According to thy mercy: not according to mine. Later, at the Offertory, the Church borrows the words of Daniel, praying in exile for the sanctuary and for the people that carries God’s name. Saint Jerome noticed that Daniel confesses that people’s sins in the first person, and gave the reason in five words: *quia unus e populo est*, because he is one of the people. That is

the posture of everybody in this church today: not a private soul with a private account to settle, but one of a people, praying for the whole of it and included in everything it confesses.

Which brings us back to the silence. “No man was able to answer him a word.” The question behind that silence was never rhetorical, and it did not stop being asked when the Pharisees walked away. How can the one David calls Lord be David’s son? In a few moments we are going to do something about that silence. The Creed will give the answer those men would not give; then bread and wine will be offered on this altar, and we shall offer ourselves with them, and may receive the one we have just confessed.

At Communion the Church appoints an old verse: “Vow ye, and pay to the Lord your God: all you that are round about him bring presents.” Vow, and pay. That is a good rule for the coming week, provided we do not vow much. Vow one thing that can actually be paid. One person you will carry instead of avoid. One hour that has been quietly taking up the room in your heart that belongs to God, which you will give back to him. Then pay it.

The prayer after Communion asks that “our vices be cured” and that “an eternal remedy” be given us. Eternal: what is begun at this altar is not finished at this altar. It is finished in the one hope of our calling: where the whole heart is at last whole, and where the question our Lord asked in the Temple is answered by sight and no longer by faith. Until that day we answer it as the Church answers it — in the Creed; when he is given to us; and during the week, in the one person we would rather not carry.

Note on Sources and Delivery

Audience and occasion. An adult parish assembly, at the Mass *Dominica decima septima post Pentecosten*, II classis, of the 1962 *Missale Romanum*, editio typica, pp. 398–400, nos. 1602–1611, for the occurrence of 20 September 2026.

Length and pace. The spoken body runs to 1,380 words. At an unhurried preaching pace of 120 to 130 words a minute that is approximately 10.6 to 11.5 minutes. The figure is arithmetic done on the word count; no speaker has delivered these words and no delivery has been timed. The prose was read through in full for sense, sentence length and ease of speech, silently and not aloud.

Relation to the reviewed readings. The expansive study of this formulary develops three readings of the whole Mass. Two of them carry the argument preached here: *The whole heart for the one God, and the one body that love gathers*, which supplies the double commandment, Augustine on the undivided heart, and the Epistle’s unity as the form that love takes in a people; and *David’s son and David’s Lord: the one God confessed in his Word and Spirit*, which supplies Christ’s own question and Augustine’s answer to it. Saint John Chrysostom’s reading of the Gospel’s two halves in his seventy-first homily on Matthew joins them: there the question about the Christ follows the scribe’s confession of one God, which Chrysostom brings from Mark 12:32 into his exposition of Matthew. The third reading, “*Thou art just, O Lord*”: *the humbled people prays with Daniel for mercy*, supplies the Introit and the Offertory as the prayer in which the other two are received, with Jerome on Daniel praying as one of his own people. Chrysostom joins the two halves of the Gospel; the reading of the whole formulary that follows from that join is the editor’s, not a Father’s. The exegetical argument joins the Gospel in both its halves, the Epistle appointed with it, and the Collect of the Mass, and draws in the Introit, the Offertory, the Communion and the Postcommunion; the Gradual, the Alleluia and the Secret are left to the studies.

Texts quoted, and their route. Scripture is the Douay–Rheims in Bishop Challoner’s revision, at the canonical verses: Mt 22:36, 37, 39, 42, 45, 46; Eph 4:2–6; Ps 118:137 and 124 (Heb. 119); Ps 75:12 (Heb. 76). The Collect and the Postcommunion are quoted in the anonymous English printed by Eugene Cummiskey at Philadelphia in 1861, which is a historical study aid and not an approved liturgical translation of the 1962 Missal. The Offertory antiphon is a compilation that no Douay verse renders, and it is described without English. Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* and Chrysostom’s homily are quoted in the nineteenth-century English of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Augustine on Ps 109 and Jerome on Daniel are reported from their Latin, with Jerome’s five words given as he wrote them. That Latin was read in the tracked digital transcriptions of Migne which this leaf registers — the Wikisource and Corpus Corporum text for the *Enarrationes*, the Wikisource text of PL 25 for the commentary on Daniel — and not on the printed columns.

Exact loci. Augustine, “no part of our life is to be unoccupied” and the one channel of the affections: *De doctrina christiana* I.22.21, the second paragraph of the chapter block I.22.20–21 that the research record inspects. Chrysostom, “this makes the way for that, and by it is again established” and “to confess Him also to be God”: *Homilies on Matthew* 71. Augustine on answering as the Pharisees answered and not remaining there, and on the form of God and the form of a servant: *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 109, 3–6. Jerome, *quia unus e populo est: Commentarii in Daniele*, on 9:5. The Creed is appointed by the rubric printed at the end of the Gospel, no. 1607.

References

- *Missale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum, Summorum Pontificum cura recognitum*, editio typica (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1962), CMAA facsimile, pp. 398–400, nos. 1602–1611.
- *The Roman Missal, Translated into the English Language for the Use of the Laity*, first revised edition (Philadelphia: Eugene Cummiskey, 1861), pp. 431–433 (XVII Sunday after Pentecost, Collect and Postcommunion).
- The Holy Bible, Douay–Rheims version, revised by Bishop Richard Challoner: Ps 75:12; 118:124, 137; Mt 22:34–46; Eph 4:1–6.
- St Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* I.22.20–21, trans. J. F. Shaw, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., vol. 2.
- St Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 109, 3–6, Latin text of Migne, PL 36–37 (Wikisource and Corpus Corporum).
- St John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 71, trans. G. Prevost, rev. M. B. Riddle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., vol. 10.
- St Jerome, *Commentarii in Daniele*, on 9:5 (Migne, PL 25, 678–681), Latin text of the Wikisource transcription.

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