

Is anyone else overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information that washes over us every day?

We are inundated by data, breaking news, Facebook updates and to do lists. In order to keep up we resort to summaries, news headlines, and sound bytes. Otherwise there would be no way to manage the data flying around us. So we get our news condensed in short headlines with just a few minor details and commentaries, we limit tweets to 140 characters and we read cliff notes instead of reading the entire novel. It is regrettable, in a way, since this reductivism doesn't capture the complexities of the complete work.

So we might understand why the scribe asks the question in the Gospel today. "Which is the first and the greatest commandment?" Understand this, there are 614 commandments in just the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Needless to say the simple statement from a word in scripture could get lost under the sheer weight of human interpretation. It must have been exhausting for the ordinary law abiding Jew. Even this scribe, this expert on the Law, was

looking for some sort of handle to organize the mountain of information. So he asks with Jesus with all sincerity, “Which is the primary, the greatest first commandment?”

Jesus not at all offended by his earnest request offers a summary of these commands. He takes the 10 commandments and narrows it down to two. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” And then Jesus adds, “and love your neighbor as yourself.” The first commandment comes from the introduction to the 10 commandments found in the books of Deuteronomy and Exodus. The second commandment comes from the book of Leviticus. In effect these two commandments summarize the tablets of stone etched with the ten commandments.

The first four commandments instruct us on how to love God and the other six commandments instruct us on how to love each other. A right relationship with God and a right relationship with our fellow humans; these are the concerns

and the hope embedded in the ten commandments.

So there it was: the answer to the scribe's question; a huge profound truth condensed in a nutshell.

The scribe goes on to repeat the Lord's answer back to him as if to memorize it and allow it to unfold in his heart. I suggest that we follow the example of the scribe and take time with these two commandments. During this busy week I ask that we all revisit the words that Jesus spoke: "Hear O Israel, The Lord is God, the Lord alone. Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength." and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Let us repeat them several times so that they also might settle into our hearts.