



## **“Thou Shalt Love the Lord thy God...”: On the Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Having approached Jesus, a lawyer asked Him: “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered him: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28-31).

We have heard this passage from the Gospel many times, but have we ever given thought to what it means to love God with all one’s heart and with all one’s soul? The heart is the spiritual center of man, where both all uncleanness and the most sacred feelings are born. We should live in such a way that our whole heart is filled with God and permeated with His presence. Our heart is always responsive to everything that goes on around us, and therefore it is often filled with confusion, emotions, and worries; yet we could live in such a way that it would be filled with God and that the love of God would reign within it. How many difficulties, calamities, and problems – both internal and external – could we avoid if we were to learn to direct our heartfelt, inner forces to the love of God, if we did not squander our soul on vanity, grief, and experiences associated with the life of this world!

How can we love God with all our mind? First of all, if we would always carry in our remembrance the Name of God, if the Jesus Prayer would be united with our mind, if the presence of God in our thought were constant. Often our minds are not where they should be; even during prayer we become neglectful and our thoughts wander “in a far country.” Often we cannot control our thoughts, and then prodigal and sinful thoughts come to us, thoughts of envy and hatred. Many vices arise specifically from the mind, and if we are unable to control them, we will not be able to prevent the development in us of vices and sinful passions.

Finally, we should love God with all our strength, in other words, with all our corporeal makeup. Not only should our mind, heart, and soul be vessels containing the love of God, but so too should our body be permeated with this love. Today we heard the words of the Apostle Paul: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10). How can God be glorified through our human body? And how can the glory of Jesus be revealed through our body? Above all, if we do not permit the many vices, sins, and passions associated with our body. How easily some of us relate to a violation of the Seventh Commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” How often in Confession one hears of abortions as something everyday and casual; one hears of extramarital affairs and of adultery. But as long as we live like this, we cannot speak of glorifying Christ through our body.

If the love of God reigns in one’s soul, heart, mind, and body, that means that one is on the path to salvation. Why did many saints attain such a condition that their bodies were altered and transfigured, and after death their remains were preserved not just incorrupt, but fragrant? It was precisely because the bodies of the saints were imbued with the love of God even during their lifetime. And we, too, to the best of our ability, should strive to ensure that our bodies would become temples of God, temples of the Holy Spirit.

With the first commandment is bound up the second: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” One does



not exist without the other. We cannot love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with our all mind, and with all our strength, and not at the same time love our neighbor. But we cannot truly love our neighbor if we do not learn to love God. It is not possible to love our neighbor and at the same time to violate the Seventh Commandment. Prodigal passion has nothing in common with love. In its outward appearance it can resemble love, but its essence is the opposite, because true love for one's neighbor is sacrificial love, and not desire directed towards the satisfaction of lust.

The Lord said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This also means that we should love ourselves, not in the sense of making concessions to ourselves and indulging our weaknesses, vices, and passions, but rather in the sense of taking care of our mind, heart, and body, so that the love of God would reign in us. If we do not love ourselves with such Christian love, then neither can we love God, nor neighbor, nor fulfill that commandment that is the greatest in the law and upon which the Law and the Prophets hang. Amen.

*Translated from the [Russian](#).*