

Love, the most important commandment  
By Bishop Milan Lach

The biggest commandment is the commandment to love God. God has to be first in our lives, dear brothers and sisters. No one or nothing else.

We need to ask ourselves every day: Is God really first in my life or is there something else that I have placed first?

Each of us needs to answer this question: myself, our priests, our seminarians, our nuns, and also you, dear brothers and sisters.

The answer to this question — Who is God for me? — must be clear. He is my Savior, my Lord, my all.

I must also choose to have good relationships with my neighbors. I must be full of love for others. My heart must be open to others. I will not close my heart to others; I will not be afraid of people. I will not run away from people.

Rather, I will go toward people, to meet them, to open communication, and to create relationships.

Dear seminarians, as you know, to be a priest today in the United States is not very popular. It's not seen as something very great, nor is it very honored in society.

So, think a good deal about whether or not you really want to follow Jesus in suffering, if you really want to sacrifice your life and suffer humiliation in this world. People will laugh at you; you will be nothing.

However, you need to know that your recompense will be great, though perhaps not in this world.

I assure you, you will have to open your heart to the faithful in your care. Perhaps you will be with only a few believers, a small congregation. But I assure you that God will bless you, and you will not die of hunger.

However, your first motivation must be for the love of God. This is the most important commandment we have: the love of God and the love of neighbor.

Because the priesthood is not a job where you work only eight hours a day, five days a week. Rather, you work 24 hours a day and seven days a week. I'm not exaggerating. I'm telling you from my experience.

If people are believers, they will see your example. You will encourage them by your life. If you lead them to God. You will lead them to life, to pray in a congregation and also in personal prayer.

You do this with service, because the most important service, the most important privilege of a priest, is to lead the people to pray. Nothing else. If we are able to lead the people to pray, the people will be with God. And, with God, we will accomplish our service to others.

So, dear brothers and sisters, we are here. Don't worry, Jesus Christ is with us. Don't worry about the future of the Byzantine Catholic Church in the United States. God is with us.

*This Voice of the Shepherd is based on a homily Bishop Lach delivered during Divine Liturgy at the annual pilgrimage to Mount St. Macrina in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, Sept. 1. The first part of his homily was published in the Sept. 9 issue of Horizons. This excerpt is from the second part of his homily.*

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