

**Mass with San Antonio Seminarians for Retreat Day
June 7, 2018**

“[It is] worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus affirmed this wisdom from the scribe who answered his question with understanding. What is the greatest commandment? We know the answer, don't we? We can recite it together Exactly. Love the Lord God with everything that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus restated the second part differently elsewhere in his ministry. He said we should love our neighbor as he has loved us. Which again, means with everything that we are.

This is something we have heard again and again, but when it is put together with the first reading we have today, it takes on a very specific challenge. Let's listen again to the challenge from St. Paul: “The word of God is not chained... If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Remind people of these things and charge them before God to stop disputing about words. This serves no useful purpose since it harms those who listen. Be eager to present yourself as acceptable to God, a workman who causes no disgrace, imparting the word of truth without deviation.”

We can be very clever, my brothers. You are smart young men. You have learned a great deal of philosophy, theology, history, rhetoric, logic, and pastoral theory. But none of that is more important than the greatest commandment – that is why it is the greatest. We lose so many opportunities to share our encounter with

the Lord, because we are too busy “disputing about words.” There is of course a place for working and disputing for clarity and rigor; these disciplines you are studying are important. But they must rest on the foundation of revelation. The Word of God is not chained by our human understanding. Theology is famously called “faith seeking understanding.” The faith comes first! We must allow ourselves to die to self – getting out of our own way. Then persevere with him. If we deny him and again take up our pride, vanity, and “disputes,” we can be assured that we will lose our way. But thanks be to God who still does not deny us. He shows us the way of mercy and reconciliation, because love is the greatest commandment. God leads by perfect example.

Let the Lord continue to teach you, brothers. We are not relativists or laxists, but we certainly must remember that the Word of God is bigger than us, beyond us. The Word is the Lord – the living God. No book or education or system can contain him. We conform ourselves to the Word, and “the Word of God is not chained.” May the Spirit of the Lord return us to the foundation of self-sacrificing love, which is far greater than any offerings or sacrifices. Let the Lord, who Pope Francis has called “the God of surprises,” once again expand your perspective, so that you can see more fully with his eyes. Thanks be to God, who makes us his workmen in the pasture of his beloved flock. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, help us with her grace and wisdom to “do whatever he tells us.”