

Heart, Soul, and Mind

Father Sinclair Ender, our recent Curate, was a great devotee of *The Book of Common Prayer*. I suspect that was true even before he went to seminary, and his seminary experience simply reinforced that devotion. I know that he taught people at Trinity a lot about the prayer book. Over the centuries it has converted many people to Anglicanism, and some say that it influenced the development of the English language as much as Shakespeare and the King James Bible.

I am always fascinated by how much of the Bible is embedded in the prayer book. I'm not just talking about the psalms at the back; I mean how much Bible shows up in the words of our liturgy and our prayers. Today's Gospel has a wonderful example of that. You may know it as the Summary of the Law that is part of every Rite I service. It comes straight out of Matthew in King James English: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

This summary puts two significant passages together, one about loving God from the book of Deuteronomy and the other about loving neighbor from Leviticus. Jesus wasn't the first to do that; it appeared elsewhere in first-century Judaism. Jesus was certainly very forceful in his belief that all of the Law and the prophets – in effect, the entire Hebrew Scriptures – could be summed up by those two statements. "Love God and love neighbor" is a message we hear again and again.

This morning I'd like to focus on the first of those, loving God. I really like what one commentator writes about it. Here's what he says:

No language better sums up the passion for God, the intimacy with God, and the fidelity to God that were the hallmarks of Jesus' own life, and to which he called others.

Your heart -- response to God from the innermost personal center of one's being;

Your life/soul -- conjures up the role of the life force that energizes us;

Your mind -- signals the inclusion of thinking and planning processes.

Let me unpack all of that. To love God with all your heart is to love God with passion, to respond to God from your center. We still think of the heart as the center of feeling, of desire. The desire for God is central to all belief. Desire always makes us restless for its fulfillment – and I think of that famous statement of St. Augustine, that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. We try so many other ways to fulfill our desires, but they all fall short because they are not God.

To love God with all your soul is to love God intimately. The word translated "soul" also means life or life-force; we get the word "psyche" from it. This is the spirit that is within, speaking with "sighs too deep for words" as St. Paul puts it. Here our sin is to put up barriers to the Spirit, both within and without. Instead we must be vulnerable in a way that connects us to an intimate God.

To love God with all your mind is to love God faithfully, aligning your thinking and reasoning with the mind of God. Again the Greek word is usually translated "understanding," emphasizing

reasoning and planning. This reminds me of a phrase of St. Anselm, faith seeking understanding. We believe in order to understand. Often we want to understand first, to be convinced by reason before we will believe by faith. My usual response to that is: decide what you would do if you did have faith, and then do it. It's remarkably effective and freeing to act *in* faith even if you have doubts.

The parallel passages in Mark and Luke add a fourth quality – strength – which is present in Deuteronomy, although that original reference lacks mind. I'm rather glad that strength is not present in Matthew's version. It could give the false impression that it all depends on our working hard to love God. I think it's just the opposite – we have to get out of the way to let God in. God already loves us, unconditionally. What is difficult for us is being open to that love.

Desire, intimacy, faithfulness. Just naming those qualities for loving God reveals how easily we are led astray by disordered desire and intimacy and by unfaithfulness. There's a reason Jesus named all of these as part of the greatest and first commandment. If we don't first love God, there's not much hope of loving our neighbor.

The genius of *The Book of Common Prayer* is to put this Summary of the Law at the beginning of the Eucharist. Combined with the Collect for Purity – the one that begins “Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open” – it sets our hearts, minds, and souls in proper order to worship God. Then having worshipped God, having received Jesus in the Word and in the Bread, we are ready once again to go out into the world and love our neighbor.

In these times of pandemic, tend your heart, soul, and mind – and keep up your strength. God give you the grace to do that, and God bless you this day and every day. Amen.

[The commentator to which I refer is John Nolland in *The Gospel of Matthew*, a volume in The New International Greek Testament Commentary series published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, in 2005.]