

Daily Homily
Friday, Third Week of Lent
20 March 2020
On the Gospel: Mark 12:28-34 ([usccb daily readings](#))

To add some humor to this time of social distancing and for some, full on quarantine, a friend of mine sent me an article in which the writer was suggesting that there has been a surge in buying books. To be specific a surge in buying plague related books, believe it or not. So in a clever way she indicated that really any book is good for these times as long as you rework them as such. She suggested a few first lines of some classics that she reworked for these times of isolation.

For example, *Moby Dick*, instead of “Call me, Ishmael.” She reworked it, “FaceTime me, Ishmael.” This one from *The Hobbit*, she reworked the opening line, “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. He planned to stay there indefinitely in order not to make the lives of essential healthcare personnel more perilous.” I, at least, appreciate the literary twists, here.

The first line of any book is supposed to be captivating. It should draw the reader into the story. There is much pressure on the first line of any literary work. It has to be clever and thought provoking. Jesus is asked, in his opinion – and as the Son of God that is a hefty opinion – which is the first line of all the commandments. Remember in the Torah, there was more than just the 10 Commandments we learned in grade school, there are actually 613. So which is the first? That’s a lot of pressure, and it’s not an unusual question. Normally Jewish students and rabbis would ask such perilous questions to each other to rouse up great debates of going back and forth with point and counterpoint. Jesus responds. There is no debate. There is no counterpoint given. His response doesn’t just offer an answer, but it also does this ... it opens up understanding in the scribe who asked.

Understanding. What a gift! When we get it, when we feel like we have advanced in wisdom and knowledge, when we feel included, when we are in “the know,” this is understanding. Pope Saint John Paul II knew this gift of the spirit well, he had such an understanding of the sacredness of the human person, “We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father’s love for us.”

And that is Jesus’ first line. That is Jesus’ first commandment.

Pray for understanding in this time in which, not only our individual lives, but our world has been interrupted. What are you supposed to learn from all this? What opportunity is this opening in your life, in the life of your family? Yes, you can worry about stockpiling toilet paper and what is going to happen to employment and income. It will all work out. No one has faced this before. It has to work out. There is more to this time than just worry. Ask Jesus your question, “Teacher, what am I supposed to learn from all this? What am I supposed to reprioritize, what responsibilities have I been putting off or passing on to others unknowingly that I can take up now?” Ask him and understand.