

My homily will be short because I have something else I want you to do today. The Gospel today sounds horrible. “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Now, there is hyperbole here. Jesus isn’t contradicting the fourth commandment. But He is saying there can be no compromise of the first commandment either – on Who comes first in my life. There is no room for compromise when it comes to my first priority. I can worship no false gods.

All the monotheistic religions know this. It is what they have in common. The Jewish Shema, “Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” The Muslim Shahadah, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet.” So, Jesus, “The first commandment is this, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

If we put anyone or anything before God, we create an idol – and that idol is always false because he, she, or it can't pay the role we hope for from it. Last week I preached about C.S. Lewis and his Inner Ring. Another favorite idea from Lewis is, I paraphrase, "Put second things first, and we lose not only the first thing – God, who cannot be fruitfully treated as anything but the center of my life – but we also lose the second, third or fourth things we put in His place because we ask too much of them." Even the most wonderful persons in our lives – let alone earthly goods -- can't fill the God-sized hole in our souls.

But if we allow God to be our first priority in life – then we get the rest thrown in with the deal. We become better spouses, parents, children, friends – when we put God before all of these – because God is love, and the more we let Him fill us up, the more we can love others. So, honestly ask yourself, looking at my choices in life, is God first in my life? Or is my life pointed toward a false idol?

Now let me change subjects. I would like to ask you to fill out a brief survey. This survey is part of our Partners in the Gospel journey of becoming one parish family with St. Monica on Mercer Island. The purpose of the survey is to hear directly from the members of Sacred Heart about what makes this community unique and valuable.

There are two questions to answer. First, how have your experiences in our parish brought you closer to God? Second, if you had to describe the main gifts and charisms of our parish to a newcomer in one sentence what would you say? What stands out for you as something to be proud of?

Note: we're just looking for no more than a couple of sentences in answer to each question. Nothing long. The survey will be collected, read, and processed by the Parish Family Advisory Council (PFAC). The PFAC is made up of five parishioners I chose

from each parish. These ten people will work together to create a report on your answers to share with the parish and guide our planning going forward.

If you are in high school or older, and a parishioner, please take a survey and pencil and begin (if you are visiting, I would ask you not to participate). The ushers will collect the completed survey in five minutes. Again, there is no need for a long answer. We're just looking for basic points.