

Sunday, October 23, 2011
Homily – SHYCON Mass

Before I begin, I just want to say as I look out at this crowd, that you young people are awesome. You are awesome in God's eyes.

How many here are aware that you are awesome in God's eyes? Let's here it!

I am sure that you young people know this, but I just want to say how that the adult leaders here at SHYCON are awesome too. Let's show them that we are aware that they are awesome.

Now, most of you are high school students, so I assume that you have to deal with questions every day, right?

A teenager once told me that high school would be a lot more fun if they didn't ask all those questions.

We all know that questions are part of the learning process, right? So what's the big deal? Someone asks you a question and you provide an answer. How hard can that be?

I am not an expert, but depending on the subject and the type of question, it appears that being asked a lot of questions in high school can be a real challenge; at least for some students, and even for some teachers. Let me give you a few examples.

- Before visiting the guidance counselor at the end of the school year, the junior class students had to fill out a form with some basic information that would help the guidance counselor to give them advice and direction about what kind of college program they might be interested in for the future. One of the questions on the form was, **“What are your vocational plans? If you are unsure, please explain.** One girl put down, “I am not sure yet. My parents want to go camping in Colorado, but I would rather sit on the beach in North Carolina.” (I forgot to tell you, I don't write these stories, I just tell them.)
- In a sophomore history exam, the teacher asked, “George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree but also admitted it.

- Why didn't his father punish him?** One boy wrote, "I think maybe it was because George still had the ax in his hand."
- A senior in high school was being interviewed by the admissions counselor at the college she wanted to attend. The counselor asked, **"If you could have a conversation with someone, living or dead, who would it be?"** The girl thought about it for a minute and answered, "The living one."
 - A junior in high school was very nervous about taking a true-false test. As soon as the teacher started to distribute the test papers, this student started asking himself, **"Why do they have to give us these stupid true-false tests? Why don't they have another option? Why don't they have true-false-or maybe.?"** So this student pulls a quarter out of his pocket and starts flipping the coin: heads-true; tails-false. There were like 50 true-false questions on the test and after the first 4 or 5 he was starting to feel pretty confident. He was thinking, "This isn't too bad." He continued on and it seemed like no time and he was finished. He jumped out of his seat and started to walk to the front of the class to hand in his test paper. When he just about got to the teacher's desk he realized that he was the first one finished. All the other students are still working on the test, so all of a sudden he panicked. He returned to his seat and sat there staring at his paper. The longer he looked at it, the more nervous he became. He reached in his pocket and took out the quarter again and started flipping it in the air. Every other toss landed on the floor which made the teacher get suspicious. The teacher approached the student and asked, **"Is there a problem?"** He replied, "No." The teacher asked, "Then what's going on?" He replied, "I was just checking my answers."
 - The Principal of the high school was walking through the hallway one morning and saw a new teacher standing outside his classroom with his forehead against a locker. The principal heard him say, **"How did you get yourself into this?"** Knowing that this poor teacher was homeroom teacher for freshman, the Principal tried to offer some moral support by asking, **"Are you okay?"** The rookie teacher lifted his head and replied, "I'll be fine as soon as I get this kid out of his locker."

OK, enough of these "question" stories. I know you are wondering what's the point?

I am sure that you noticed that today's Gospel reading revolves around a question: **“Which commandment of the Law is the greatest?”**

We know from the Gospel reading that the way this question was posed to Jesus made it a trick question. I don't know about you, but trick questions make me crazy.

Did you notice that Jesus wasn't phased by the trick question. He calmly and confidently gave a straight answer; one that was based on the truth. Jesus said:

- The first commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.
- The second commandment is similar; you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus finishes by saying the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

I hope that most everyone here understands what it means

- That we are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind
- That we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves

But, I can understand that maybe some of you are a bit confused as to what these commandments mean or which one is the greatest commandment.

And what does it mean that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments?

Before I explain; before I answer, I would like all of you young people gathered here for SHYCON to think about some things that our Pope Benedict XVI said this summer in his main message at World Youth Day in Spain.

Our Holy Father said that young people have a deep desire

- for authentic relationships
- to know true love
- to achieve personal fulfillment and real security
- to have a peaceful and happy future

Our Holy Father also said that

- many young people do not think about stability and security
- many young people feel deeply insecure, uncertain, or confused about their lives
- many young people have no stable points of reference on which to build their lives
- many young people fall into a kind of blind conformity to the fads of the moment

Our Holy Father said that

- all young people deserve not to be misled by the relativism that is found everywhere in the media and cultural attitudes all over the world
- all young people are entitled to receive the truth about personal freedom
- all young people are entitled to receive solid points of reference on which to formulate the answers to the questions you face in your lives

Finally, Our Holy Father said that what you need is to have deep roots like a young plant that needs solid support and life-giving source of nourishment.

Pope Benedict states very plainly what has been talked about in the theme of this year's SHYCON, that your lives, individually and as part of the Church, need to be rooted in Christ, who is the only real source of what we need, because Jesus Christ, and only Jesus Christ, is

- the way
- the truth
- and the life

Pope Benedict reminds us especially that God is life, and that is why every creature reaches out towards life. The Holy Father reminds us that if we ignore God or set God aside,

- we separate ourselves from the source of life; and
- we deprive ourselves of fulfillment and joy and internal peace

So, where are you to get that source?

How do you establish those roots?

I don't know about you, but sometimes it can make me really make me crazy when someone answers your question with a question.

Forgive me for doing this but I want to warn you that the answer to the question, "How do you establish those roots in Christ?" can be answered with the question; the question asked of Jesus in the Gospel: Which is the greatest of the commandments?"

Is this a trick question for us like it was when it was asked of Jesus? Actually, it seems like a reasonable question. It certainly fits in with the pragmatic attitude in our culture which motivates us to find an instant solution to a problem. "Tell me what to do, I'll do it and that's that. Otherwise, do not ask me to get involved in any cause or make me join an organization."

Many people don't mind doing good deeds (well maybe after being asked at least a few times), but they don't want it to involve any commitment.

But, we know and believe that serving God takes a lot more than a simple action.

"Loving God with your whole mind, your whole heart, and your whole soul, and loving your neighbor as yourself," is more an attitude in life than a list of things to do.

One of the attitudes or orientations of every person's life has to do with their final destiny.

- Some people have no idea where they are ultimately headed and often this lack of direction causes confusion in their daily living
- We are blessed because God has revealed that our ultimate destination is to be with God in heaven.
- However sometimes, even with that direction and purpose in our lives, many of us find it difficult to find our way to God.

How do you find God and how do you find the truth that will bring meaning and purpose and peace and confidence and security and hope in your lives?

The answer is in the answer that Jesus gave to the trick question posed to him:

- Love God with all your soul, heart, and mind

- Love your neighbor as yourself

Jesus tells us that everything else is based on this.

In order to love that way, you need to find love in your life from the source of love and you need to share that love with others and allow God to share it with you.

And where is that love to be found?

I want to say this very plainly, so please listen. Young people gathered here for SHYCON, are you listening right now?

I want to give you the best advice on how to go about finding and strengthening the roots that we need to connect us to God:

1. Pray every day. In your prayer, ask God for what you need. But don't stop there. In your prayer, tell God what is going on in your life. Be honest and sincere. Tell God you love him and please, please, tell God that you want him to be part of your life. Young people here at SHYCON, let's hear it for the gift of prayer in our lives.
2. Receive the sacraments frequently; they are a precious gift from God.
 - I am talking especially about the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation in which you can confess your sins and receive God's mercy and forgiveness
 - I am talking especially about the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in which you can receive and connect with the Body and Blood of Christ by
 - Attending Mass every Sunday
 - Receiving Holy Communion as frequently as possible
 - Spending time before the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament
 - For those who have not yet received the sacrament of Confirmation; you need to receive that gift of the Holy Spirit that Christ promised to send. Is there anyone here who received that sacrament this year? Where are you? Ask them. Ask them about how the Holy Spirit makes a difference in your life. Ask them whether it is worth it to go through the confirmation program in your parish. Those who have received the sacrament of Confirmation, isn't it worth it to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?

- Young people here at SHYCON, let's hear it for the gift of the sacraments in our lives.
3. Read and reflect on the Word of God every day. How many people here have a Bible? When was the last time you opened it? Do it every day. I am serious. Don't be afraid of it. Don't make excuses that you do not understand it. How many people here read the Bible every day? How many read it at least once a week? Keep doing it. It contains the truth; it points you on the right way; it gives you life because it comes from the Lord of life. Young people here at SHYCON, let's hear it for the gift of God's word in our lives.
 4. Learn what you can about your Catholic faith. The more you know, the more confident you will become because you will have acquired more of the truth. Besides what you learn in your school or parish, I want to recommend you get a copy of the new Youth Catechism (YOUCAT). Check out some of the Catholic websites for young people. There a lot of good information out there about our faith. Let's hear it for the gift of the truth that is available to us through the teaching of Christ and the Church.
 5. Finally; the most important advice I want to give you about establishing and strengthening the roots you have in Christ, is to do what Jesus Our Savior tells us in the Gospel today: Love your neighbor and love yourself.
 - Treat others with love and respect
 - Help the poor and the needy
 - Show people you are not all just caught up with yourself
 - Loving yourself begins with accepting the huge gift of love that comes from God. God is love; God loves you unconditionally; that means no matter what. Don't be afraid to accept the love that God gives to you. And don't give into the temptation to settle for cheap love from others as a substitute.
 - Let's hear it for the gift of God's love in our lives.

If you do these things that I am recommending, your life will be so much better, because doing all these things is not the point. The point is getting connected and staying connected; getting rooted in the love of Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior.

If you do these things that I am recommending, you will be able to answer tough questions and even trick questions:

- **"If you could have a conversation with someone, living or dead, who would it be?"**
- **"How did you get yourself into this?"**
- **"Why didn't his father punish him?"**
- **"What are your vocational plans?"**
- **"Why do they have stupid true-false tests?"**

If you ever need help with these questions, please call on your parish priest or those who assist with faith formation for young people in your parish. Or if you ever see me around somewhere and want to ask me a question about your relationship with Christ and how to live according to his commands, please let me know.

Finally, please know that you are in my prayers. And remember – you really are awesome! May God bless you now and always.