

Grace & peace of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all! Today the topic is the Greatest Commandment. Jesus said when a Scribe asked, the first is: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with your strength.** The second is: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** There is no other commandment greater than these.”

I begin the homily with a story, a scene from the movie *Up in the Air*. In one of the scenes, a young man is having second thoughts about getting married. The wedding ceremony is about to begin, but he has a serious case of cold feet. He is not sure he can go through with the wedding. A member of the family is sent to talk to him.

The young man says, “I don’t think I’ll be able to do this.” He asks, “Why would you say that today?” The frightened young man says, “Well, last night I was laying in bed, and I couldn’t get to sleep, so I started thinking about the wedding and the ceremony and about our buying a house, and moving in together, and having a kid, and then having another kid, and then Christmas and Thanksgiving and spring break, and going to football games, and then all of a sudden they are graduated and getting jobs and getting married and, you know, I’m a grandparent, and then I’m retired, and I’m losing my hair, and I’m getting fat, and the next thing I know I’m dead. And it’s like, I can’t stop from thinking, what’s the point? I mean, what is the point?”

In the gospel text when this religious leader asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” he was basically asking, “What is the point? What matters most?” There are a lot of potential answers to that question, from money to success to beauty to power to fame. But in this biblical story, Jesus says what matters most is: **Relationship with God and others.**

Steve and Lisa met and fell in love while earning their MBAs at a leading university. Young, sharp, and highly motivated, they shared a common goal to succeed in business, make a lot of money, and live the American dream. Steve and Lisa married. Soon thereafter they accepted business positions in a large city. A decade later found them earning huge incomes in major-league, high-finance corporations. Although their jobs routinely demanded sixty to eighty hours of work per week, the money was great, and they loved spending it. They bought a large house in a fashionable part of the city. Between the two of them, they owned four cars. They bought a cabin in the mountains about an hour outside the city. They even purchased a boat. Their entire lives focused on career success, money, and the stuff money could buy.

Steve and Lisa were now pushing forty years of age. With her biological clock ticking louder every year, Lisa wanted a child. About a year later they had a son, whom they named Nathan. Steve and Lisa had it all—youth, success, money, and now a beautiful child. But things were not right in their souls. Since both of them worked an enormous number of hours, Nathan stayed in day care all day, and a nanny took care of him most evenings.

Steve and Lisa rarely spent time together and had minimal contact with their baby. And, because of their busy schedules, they had virtually no time for friends, community affairs, or church. By the time Nathan was a year old, Steve and Lisa hit a crisis point. They asked themselves, “Is this all there is to life? Do we really want to put in endless hours at work in order to make more money and buy more stuff?”

Eventually Steve and Lisa realized that climbing the corporate ladder of success, making boatloads of money, and buying lots of stuff was not a big enough life. So they made a life-changing decision. On the same day they both resigned their jobs. Steve took a forty-hour-a-week job managing a small business that paid less than half of his corporate salary. Lisa took a part-time job as a business consultant working two days per week, making about 20 percent of her previous income. They sold their huge house and purchased a simple home in a middle-class neighborhood. They also sold their cabin, boat, and two of their four cars. Although their new life proved dramatically different, for Steve and Lisa, less equaled more. They now had time for each other, for Nathan, and for their friends. They also got involved in their community and went back to church. Although they earned substantially less income, life was far richer.

Six years later, when Nathan turned seven years old, his second-grade teacher gave her class a unique assignment. She told each student to write a brief essay and to draw a picture depicting their version of a perfect life. Nathan completed the assignment and turned it in to his teacher. After she graded the assignment, Nathan brought it home, along with some math and spelling worksheets. He laid them on the kitchen table and went out to play with his neighborhood friends. Later Lisa sat down at the table and picked up Nathan’s papers. As she looked at his “perfect life” assignment, tears began to flow down her face. In fact, she began to weep—not out of sadness but out of joy.

Nathan’s perfect life project had three sections. First, he drew a picture of his modest house. The drawing included Nathan, his mom and dad, and his dog. Under the drawing of his house he wrote “My home.” To the right of his house he drew a checkerboard with faces inside each square. The caption under the drawing read, “My friends.” Next to his friends Nathan drew a picture of a church with a steeple. The caption read, “My church.” Under the three pictures of his home, friends, and church, Nathan wrote his brief essay. He said, “A perfect life for me is the life that I’m in right now. I have a lot of friends, and a good family too, and a good church. I do not need a perfect life. I already have a perfect life.”

Unlike many Americans, Steve, Lisa, and Nathan have figured out what matters most in life. They’ve learned that career success, money, big houses, and status, cars are not the main thing. Instead, what matters most are our relationships—with God and with others. If we, like Steve, Lisa, and Nathan ever figure that out—not just in our heads but in our hearts—we’ll come much closer to living “a perfect life.”