

The scene in the ticket line was familiar. A mother standing there with two children. The agent asked, "Are both these children under 12?" "Yes, she replied." And in they went at the reduced rate. Then within earshot of the agent, one child calls out, "But, Mom, I <sup>am</sup> twelve." When a mother has been teaching her children ~~lessons in~~ <sup>the value of</sup> honesty, it's hard <sup>for her</sup> to explain why she might lie. There are reasons: She's trying to save money. The money she saves will ease the grocery bill, or give them a chance to buy more tickets. Besides, she's lied before: about her taxes, about her age, and she's lied to herself about how good she is, and how good she looks. We all make simple moral decisions every day, and each one tells us something about ourselves. The mother in this story learned that frugality meant more to her than honesty.

Jesus reveals today the top value--the one law that is higher than the rest. That value is charity: love of God and love of neighbor.

The story we hear today happens just a few days before Jesus dies. He has arrived in Jerusalem and finds himself in the midst of bitter disputes with the scribes and the pharisees--disputes that will lead to his death. But in the middle of the storm, he finds a calm port. He converses peacefully and respectfully with a scribe.

The question the scribe puts to Jesus was a common one for rabbis. They all studied the Jewish laws contained in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Most people know the ten commandments, or at least know about them if they can't list them all, but if you add up all the laws in the Torah you get much more than ten. You get, to be exact, 613 laws. Still a few shy of Jackson County, but it's quite a few. There was an old saying that claimed there was exactly the same number of laws in the Torah as bones in the human body. The comparison reveals how important the law was for the structure of Hebrew faith. So, among these 613 laws, which one was more important than all the rest? That was the popular question.

The two laws Jesus quotes are from two different books of the Bible, and what is unique to him is that he was the first rabbi to put the two laws together: Love God, and love your neighbor.

There are many laws inside us: Be frugal. Be honest. Be successful. Be first. Be loyal. Learn. Have fun. Make peace. They're all good laws, but sometimes they fight for first place. If charity is in first place for us, it will help us know <sup>what</sup> to decide when the other laws are at war. <sup>he's come, work, parish</sup>