

To date it has been shown that apes and chimpanzees can communicate via sign language with humans and can answer questions and relate facts. However, they have never yet asked a question, something humans start doing interminably at a very young age, even before they are verbal.

The questions we ask reveal to us the type of person we are becoming and are usually more important than the answers we receive. We ask all kinds of questions every day from mundane questions about facts, time, weather or sports scores to more personal questions about others. We might ask a person “how are you doing?” in a way that gives them the chance to answer with meaning or respond as if in reply to a brief courtesy. We ask ourselves questions too like “what should I eat today?”, “what should I do today?” or in more reflective moments “what am I doing with my life?”

The questions we ask determine the type of person we are becoming because the questions reveal where our desire is, what we’re really interested in. Our desire to learn is necessary for answers to be helpful to us. We might be receiving good answers every day from the people around us, and the Lord Himself, but have no interest yet in listening to them. The *desire* to receive the truth is a prior condition for being able to hear and integrate it.

Today Jesus was asked a very good question by a sincere scribe “***Which is the first of all the commandments?***” This excellent question reveals many good things already about the scribe; he was aware of his lack of knowledge (like Socrates), he asked a deep question about God’s will from the person he thought could best answer it (Jesus). The scribe had a good motive unlike others who asked Jesus reasonably good questions with a desire to trap Him “should we pay the tax to Caesar?”, or some who asked Jesus good questions to justify themselves “who is my neighbor?”

The scribe asks a high-level question with the noble motive of seeking the truth about God’s will and so he was rewarded with a full answer from Jesus with the Shema, the foundational statement of Jewish faith: “***Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.***” That first word “Shema” in Hebrew means “hear” or “listen”, again the precondition for understanding. The scribe also believed what Jesus said to be true and so heard the beautiful words that he would like us all to hear; “***You are not far from the kingdom of God.***”

Answers come from without, but questions come from within ourselves and the Lord made us to ask big, deep questions. When I first announced that I thought God was calling me to be a priest and I was accepted in the seminary, a family member asked me a question I have never been asked before. He said, “you don’t have to answer it right now, but how do you *love* God?” He asked it with sincerity, not wondering how to fulfill Jesus’ command, but almost as if God wasn’t lovable, like the Lord was a scary teacher ready to punish or discipline, rather than being the fulfillment of all human desire.

Sometimes people need to ask us good questions to get us thinking about what really matters to us. Jesus did that too, and still asks us today: “***What are you looking for?***”

God bless,

Fr. Mike