

November 4, 2018  
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Mark 12:28b-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that (he) answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

#### Background:

The text for last week's gospel was Mark's account of Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus. That text is at the end of the tenth chapter of Mark's Gospel. The eleventh chapter begins with a description of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem. (Mark 11:1-11) The rest of the chapter follows with other events that are leading up to Jesus' crucifixion: cursing a fruitless fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25); the chasing of the merchants from the temple (Mark 11:15-19); and the questioning of Jesus' authority by the Jewish religious authorities (Mark 11:27-33). In chapter twelve Mark describes Jesus telling the parable of tenant farmers who refused to give the owner his share of the harvest (Mark 12:1-12); the Pharisees, joining with the supporters of Herod, try to trap Jesus with questions about paying taxes (Mark 12:13-17); and the Sadducees try to embarrass him with questions about life after death. (Mark 12:18-27) These encounters lead to Mark's account of the scribe coming to Jesus with his question about the greatest commandment - the text for this Sunday.

Unlike most of the questions addressed to Jesus, this scribe approaches Jesus with respect, seeking his opinion. One of the things that stand out in this text is a lack of hostility between the scribe and Jesus, especially given where this text is located within the gospel. Prior to this in Mark, when the scribes and the Pharisees have a question for Jesus, it is with the intention of trapping and/or discrediting him before his followers and the crowds. Jesus responds to such situations with a question of his own that turns the tables on them, brings honor to him, and brings shame to his opponents. Here Jesus' response is short, direct and to the point. But more important, the tenor of the dialogue is one of mutual respect. The scribe, in verse 32, compliments Jesus' insights and rephrases Jesus' teaching in his own words, a gesture of respect for Jesus and his teaching. Jesus, for his part, recognizes in verse 34 that the scribe is not just restating what he heard, but has made it his own belief, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

Jesus' response to the scribe's question is not new doctrine. He draws on two texts from the Hebrew Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. While Jesus' answer draws on texts from the Hebrew tradition, the uniqueness of Jesus' answer is that he combines two different texts, something that rabbis never did. Those who heard Jesus' response would also hear it as a call to treat people with the same respect that they treated God. For them, love was not about how one felt, but honor one showed by one's action. This point is made even more strongly by the way that Jesus and this scribe have been able to treat each other in this dialogue, given the growing tension that is characteristic of others who represent religious and Roman authority at this point in Mark's gospel.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. When you recall situations of conflict in your own life...
2. Pretend for a moment that you were present when this scribe approached Jesus in Jerusalem, with all the events that Mark has described having taken place. What would be going on inside you as you hear the scribe ask his questions?
3. What would be going on inside you as you hear their conversation?

4. If you were asked what is the most important commandment...
5. When you hear Jesus say simply, the first commandment is "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," you...
6. When he adds that the second is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you...
7. Do you love yourself?
8. Can you talk with God about your own desire to love God, or to love your neighbor, or perhaps some concern that arises from this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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#### **Excerpts from the readings for November 4, 2018, the Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the Lord, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life.

Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the Lord, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

*I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.*

*My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!*

*Praised be the Lord, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies.*

*The Lord lives! And blessed be my rock! Extolled be God my savior.*

*You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed.*

Brothers and sisters: The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. He is always able to save those who approach God through him, he lives forever to intercede for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

**Excerpts from Deuteronomy 6:2-6; Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51; Hebrews 7:23-28; and Mark 12:28-34**