

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time by Father Dave

There is a lot of love in today's readings. In the selection from Deuteronomy, Moses tells God's people to "*love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.*" This is known as the Shema. AND – the reading addressed to the Hebrews reminds us, as well, that Jesus gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice for all of us – the ultimate sign of love. Jesus, in the Gospel, adds a new commandment – "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

God's love is unconditional. I kind of liken God's love as a "no-strings-attached" love – meaning – God doesn't say that He'll love us if we do this or do that, and that He would withdraw His love from us if we don't "jump through all the proper hoops." God's love is unconditional. There are no conditions to His love for us. He loves us! And that's it! He loves us – regardless. He will always love us.

God does not expect us to be perfect in order to earn His love. He freely gives it in spite of our faults, our imperfections, weaknesses and sinfulness. But God commands that we do the same. He calls us to put Him first in our lives, before our worldly goods, our ambitions and all that consumes our daily lives.

For right now, let's spend some time looking at the other commandment that Jesus gives to us: love of neighbor as we love ourselves / caring for our neighbor as we care for ourselves / speaking about our neighbor as we would want people to speak about us. Here, Jesus is quoting a law from the Book of Leviticus. (Keep in mind, with both of these: Deut & Lev – there is a parallel with Paul's definition of LOVE as he defines it in his First Letter to the Corinthians - chapter 13).

On the surface, this seems an easy message to understand and to practice in our daily lives. But a deeper reflection challenges us to rethink this. *Love your neighbor as yourself* IS NOT a suggestion; it is a command. And to place some importance on the need for LOVE, the scribe shares with Jesus this added thought – "to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices". Translated into 2021 language – just because we do our morning and nite prayers, our rosaries, our novenas, go to Church on Sundays, don't eat meat on Fridays – this is all well and good. But – LOVE of one another is worth more in God's eyes than doing all of that other stuff. (God wants us to do all those spiritual exercises, but He also wants us to live lives of loving service). To be true followers of Jesus requires that we live out the command of love. The challenge comes when we answer the question, "Who is our neighbor?"

Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been beset by conflict. He is barraged with political, theological, and religious challenges. The Pharisees and Herodians attempt to trap Jesus by asking about taxes to Caesar.

Then, the Sadducees question Him about resurrection. And so, when the scribe approaches Jesus in today's reading, we might see another trap being laid out for Jesus. A Jewish Scribe was a "lawyer" in the sense that he was responsible for knowing and interpreting the Torah. His question – "Which is the first of all the commandments" seems self-evident. And Jesus answers as would be expected of any first-century Jew, by reciting the Shema. But then Jesus adds further elaboration. As Mark presents it, Jesus affirms the central tenet of Judaism and reminds His disciples – and you and me – that love of God is borne out by love of neighbor.

"Who is our neighbor?" is not a geographical question – meaning the person next door, or down the street, or in my neighborhood. "Who is our neighbor?" is a theological question – meaning: every human being is our neighbor, by virtue of being made in God's image. Because in the end, it comes down to this: "Love the 'unlovable.'" Love those who are hard to love, those who have hurt us and those we just don't like very much. Put this way – loving requires some discipline on our parts and isn't always going to be easy. Christian loving, as Jesus explains it and lives it, requires forgiveness. It demands putting aside judgments, and it forces us to reach beyond our own wants and needs so as to put others first. Sometimes, it is so difficult that it requires grace and prayer, and God's guidance and intervention. But God's abundant strength is greater than anything we can do on our own. His graces and blessings will give us all that we need to live that love in our lives for others - even when it is challenging and difficult.

We may ask the question -Why should we love others – even though some may be difficult to love? And the answer is - Because God loves us - & our living out His love in our lives towards others is a show of Gratitude to God for His love for us.

A PRAYER FOR ALL SOULS

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, remembering the promise of the Resurrection, I humbly and sincerely offer these prayers for (Names) and all the faithful departed.

I thank You for all that we shared in this earthly life and I pray that my prayers will help them on their journey to the fullness of life and happiness with You in Heaven. Purify them from all that is not holy so they may dwell in the mystery of Your perfect love forever.

With Your grace and blessings, I pray that I shall be reunited with them again in paradise.

Our Father ... Hail Mary ... Glory be ... May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN.

BULLETIN REFLECTION by Father Rody
OCT 31 2021...31ST SUN YR-B...MK 12, 28-34

29 Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!

What is the first again? 'The first is this: Hear, O Israel!'

In the first reading from Deuteronomy 6, 4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!

They speak the same tone and the statement is preceded by 'Hear, O Israel.' Can we deal on this first?

Is this a coincidence, though separated by time and authorship they stated the same thing? Is this like an exam in the classroom that a teacher would always say after explaining the mechanics, '*Class no copying please-is that loud and clear*'? What could be the reason of 'Hear, O Israel'?

Hear, O Israel or *better known as 'Shema Israel'* is the famous prayer of the Jews reminding them of the key term of their faith that is...there is only one Lord-one God. *It is introduced with Hear O Israel because in the OT, there were several instances that the Israelites did not listen to Yahweh because of their stony hearts (for example... on their way to the Promised Land and with their guidelines called Ten Commandments).*

Introducing then the greatest commandment with Hear O Israel is deeply rooted in their history which is but proper for the present generation to listen to. This is not simply having the correct data of history (the 'specifics' dates, time, place etc.) more so it points to the effects of a kind of action which is a product of not listening especially to the elders (parents,

grandparents...)*...remorse is always at the end, as the old would always say.*

Hear O Israel, then is reminder of their history and at the same an admonition of not repeating such history...*learn from it.*

LASTLY...We beg the saints and all the souls whom we love to keep praying for us...for our good health...for our well-being...especially that this pandemic would already end soon. Also, we remember them on their special days (Nov.1-2).



All You Holy Saints of God, Pray for Us!