

Homily for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deut. 6. 2-6, Hebrews 7. 23-28, Mark 12. 28-34

Last Sunday we read from the Gospel of Mark chapter 10. Today we read from the Gospel of Mark chapter 12. I think it is important for us to fill in the blanks if you will. After the healing of Bartimaeus (the blind man) who demonstrates the need for us to be persistent in prayer. In Mark's Gospel, chapters 11 & 12 we would have read about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, Jesus cleanses the Temple, and the chief priests, scribes and the elders question Jesus about His authority. But if we listen close to the question posed to Jesus in today's Gospel the scribe appears to be sincere as opposed to testing Jesus.

It was not uncommon to question the rabbi or teacher. This question is not a trick question as so often Jesus had received. Rather this is a question designed to see if Jesus, the teacher, "has the knowledge necessary to be teaching others about God and His will for others" (Mitch and Sri).

Jesus is posed with the question, "which is the first of all the commandments?" First, Jesus recapitulates, that is, He recaps if you will, the message from Moses in Deuteronomy. Jesus says, "The first is this, 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 CCC 518 states that "Christ's whole life is a mystery of recapitulation. All Jesus did, said, and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his original vocation." Jesus' first part of His answer has to do with man's relationship with God.

This relationship is not just one of friends or acquaintances, rather it is a relationship of love. Think of the relationship Adam and Eve originally had with God before the fall. They lived in perfect harmony. There was no violence, no wars, even the animals lived in harmony. Then Satan stepped in and sin occurred and grew. The world changed drastically. As we read in the Sacred Scriptures man grew away from the relationship with God. There appeared to be a severe falling away from God. Jesus is reminding us, bringing us back to the much needed relationship with God. In today's world we are enticed by material things, by instant gratification and satisfaction.

The second part of Jesus' answer is that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Notice both the commandments center around love. If we were to

recognize Jesus in every person we meet would we not treat them with utmost love? This is what we are called to do, to see Jesus in one another.

We speak of love often, we read of love but how do we define or understand what love is? If we turn to 1 Cor. 13. 4-8 not only will we learn what love is but what love is not, “love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude, Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”

Remember in Genesis 1.26, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Man is thus created to be in a relationship. First and foremost with God, one God. In 1 John 4.8,16 we read “God is Love.” St John further tells us “God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The word love is used about 680 times throughout the Bible.

Jesus in a simple answer about commandments reveals to all mankind in two short sentences how to live. The key is love. This love of God includes a surrender of one’s heart and soul to God, to God’s great and merciful plan in which he has for each of us. If we love our neighbor as ourselves what need is there for laws. Well, we are all human and God knew we would fall short. God sent His only begotten son. Think of the suffering Jesus did for us. Jesus’ suffering is a true demonstration of what love is.

Jesus in His reply to a simple question directs all of us where our hearts and minds should be as we grow in our loving relationship with God. My friends in Christ, I ask each of us to do an examination of conscience. Ask yourself did I love and respect God with my whole heart, mind, body and soul. Did I place God first in my thoughts and prayers. I challenge you to open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 13. Begin at verse 4 and ask yourself did I treat everyone I met today with love, with patience and kindness, was I jealous or boastful, was I arrogant or rude, did I rejoice at others failures. Let us follow Jesus’ words so we to will not be “far from the kingdom of God.”