

**31<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; October 31<sup>st</sup> 2021**  
**Deuteronomy 6:2-6; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 12:28-34**

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

The scribes and Pharisees always accused Jesus of breaking the Mosaic Law. But in today's gospel, the encounter of Jesus with the scribe is a clear example that Jesus respected the Commandments which were the only Laws given to Israel through Moses. This same story is written also by both Matthew and Luke with slight variation. From the account of Mark and also Matthew it seems that the scribe was very satisfied with the answer of Jesus who quoted the first Commandment as the greatest of Laws. But if we read the same account given by Luke in chapter 10, we come to know that the scribe had a real problem to understand who his neighbor was? So Jesus narrates the famous parable of the *Good Samaritan*.

For the people of Israel the first and greatest law is the first Commandment which Moses gives in the Book of Deuteronomy. **"Hear O, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone!"** That single sentence is the real creed of Judaism. The Synagogue service always began with the declaration of the first Commandment in full which is called the *Shema*. As a pious Jew, Jesus too considered this Commandment as the first and the greatest. So he simply quoted to the scribe the Commandment from Deuteronomy 6:4. But here Jesus did something different which no Rabbi had ever ventured to do. In other words, Jesus took a directive from Leviticus 19:18, which read, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** and put together with the first Commandment. Thus he summarized the 10 Commandments into two; *'Love of God and Love of neighbor.'* From the response of the scribe it is evident that he had no difficulty to accept the second law as another Commandment and he leaves Jesus with compliment. But it is very clear that the scribe left the scene without understanding the concept of neighbor meant by Jesus. The question of the scribe in Luke chapter 10, **'Who is my neighbor?'** gave Jesus the opportunity to explain through the parable of the Good Samaritan as who the neighbor is. In this parable we see the fundamental difference between Jesus and the scribe in understanding the neighbor. For a Jew his neighbor was supposed to be another fellow Jew and all others outside of the Jewish community were Gentiles and as such to be considered as the enemies of the Jews. Jesus explained to the scribe as who is to be considered as his neighbor. It is very clear from the parable that the *"Good Samaritan"* was a Gentile and the wounded man was a Jew. For Samaritans were Gentiles. **So in the view of Jesus, anyone who is in need of your help is supposed to be your neighbor no matter who he/she is.**

As Jesus had put these two great laws together, it is very clear that they are the two sides of the same coin and the one without the other is not complete. In other words, we cannot love God and at the same time hate fellow beings and vice versa. Unfortunately, many Christians keep separate compartments between the love of God and love of neighbor. They think that loving or hating our neighbor has nothing to do with their love for God. These Christians are Church goers and very active members of the community too. They have full respect and love for God. But coming out of the Church they are different people. Some of them even refuse to look at the face of some members, let alone talking to them; they find it very hard to forgive their fellow Christians. They wrongly conclude that they are united to Christ and they walk in the true light who is Jesus Christ. St. John in his letter warns such people; he says, **“Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall” (1John 2:9-10).**

I hear people sometimes say, *“It is not that easy to love and appreciate people who are mean to you and hurt your feelings; so it is Ok I hate them.”* To such people St. John says again in his letter: **“God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him” (1John 4:16 & 20).** Jesus is the only religious leader in the entire history commanded his followers, *“Love your enemies and pray for them.”* But when he says so, he does not mean that we have to love them as we love our spouses, children or siblings; rather, at least we should keep a benevolent love towards them and should not wish anything bad to happen in their lives. In order to love everybody around us, there is an easy way, that is: first of all I should consider me as an imperfect human being and then I will see all others as imperfect human beings. I can fail, forget and overlook things; you can do the same things. So both of us are on the same page and deserve encouragement correction and sympathy. When I consider as myself I am OK and look at you, then you are not OK in my eyes. *Please remember, God lives in the hearts where there is love; whereas, God dies in the hearts which are filled with ill feelings, hatred and unforgiving attitudes.*