



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 3rd 2024**

Theme: "There is no other commandment greater than these."

Gathering Prayer

All: Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"
²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'
³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he;
³³ and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."
³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any question.

Gospel Focus

The scribe who asks Jesus about the greatest commandment is an interesting character. It is hard to get a read on him: this kind of question, from a scribe, is usually intended as a trick for Jesus. His response, though, is one of sincere acceptance, showing an understanding that earns Jesus' approval. Perhaps his question, then, was not a trick but one of an earnest seeker striving after God in love. Jesus' response gives two commandments rooted in love, perhaps the scribe's recognition of the truth in Jesus' answer came from a heart already shaped by genuine love for God and neighbor. In any event, this gospel reminds us that many of our human boundaries fall apart in the face of the God who calls us to love. Jesus and the scribe-usually adversaries-here understand each other and are able to engage in honest dialogue.

Gospel Reflection

There's a famous scene in the play *Fiddler on the Roof*, where Tevye, the protagonist, tells his wife Golde that he has decided to give permission for their daughter Hodel to marry Perchik, a student and Bolshevik revolutionary. Golde protests that he has absolutely nothing, but Tevye replies that it's a new world, that now people marry for love, and what can they do? Tevye then turns to Golde and asks her if she loves him. She doesn't know how to respond, she skirts the question and when Tevye keeps pressing her for an answer, she recites all that she has been doing for him for twenty-five years: washing his clothes, cooking his meals, cleaning his house, giving him children, milking the cow. Still not satisfied, Tevye asks her again if she loves him. She observes, "For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him, twenty-five years, my bed is his; if that's not love, what is?"

In the play, Golde gives all the evidence of love in action and then concludes that these constitute love. In today's gospel a scribe asks a question that comes at the issue of love from another direction. He wants to know which is the first of all the commandments, that is, what actions must take priority if one wants to respond correctly to God's love. Jesus does not help him out with the particulars. He simply advises him to love God back with his entire being: heart, soul, mind, and strength. And then a bit more concretely, he adds that loving one's neighbor as oneself puts flesh and bones on this loving response to divine love.

The dialogue between the scribe and Jesus, like that of Tevye and Golde, emphasizes that love does not consist so much in feelings, as in concrete loving deeds toward the other. This is how Jesus can speak about love as something that is commanded. One cannot be commanded to feel warmly towards the another, but can be mandated to treat another with loving kindness. Knowing oneself as the recipient of gratuitous divine acts of loving kindness enables one to respond in kind. A concrete way by which human beings can express love toward God is by extending that love toward fellow human beings.

The two-pronged formulation of the love command does not give hard-and-fast answers about how to make difficult choices for prioritizing loving deeds in daily circumstances. Jesus, for example, was faced with hard choices several times when the command to love seemed to clash with the command to observe the Sabbath. Which took priority? In a number of instances, he healed people on the Sabbath, choosing to raise up a woman crippled and bent over (Lk 13:10-17), to restore a man's withered hand (Mk 3:1-6), and a blind man's sight (Jn 9:1-16). When challenged he interprets these actions as giving proper expression to the intent of Sabbath, fulfilling the prime commands to love God, and neighbor. When one's whole self is centered on love, that's all that's needed to know how to make the day-to-day choices.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Deuteronomy 6:2-6

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 grow and 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."

Responsorial Reading — Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R: The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion, we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing. **(R)**

Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed. **(R)**

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. **(R)**

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back
rejoicing, carrying their sheaves. **(R)**

Second Reading — Hebrews 7:23-28

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. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession 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.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

129. Christians therefore read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament; but it must not make us forget that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as Revelation reaffirmed by our Lord himself.(Cf. Mk 12:29-31) Besides, the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament.(Cf. I Cor 5:6-8; 10:1-11) As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.(Cf. St. Augustine, Quaest. in Hept. 2, 73: PL 34,623; Cf. DU 16)

202. Jesus himself affirms that God is "the one Lord" whom you must love "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"(Mk 12:29-30) At the same time Jesus gives us to understand that he himself is "the Lord".(Cf. Mk 12:35-37) To confess that Jesus is Lord is distinctive of Christian faith. This is not contrary to belief in the One God. Nor does believing in the Holy Spirit as "Lord and giver of life" introduce any division into the One God:

We firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal infinite (immensus) and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; three persons indeed, but one essence, substance or nature entirely simple.(8)

228. "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD..." (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29). "The supreme being must be unique, without equal. . . If God is not one, he is not God" (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, 1, 3, 5: PL 2, 274).

575. Many of Jesus' deeds and words constituted a "sign of contradiction", (Lk 2:34) but more so for the religious authorities in Jerusalem, whom the Gospel according to John often calls simply "the Jews", (Cf. Jn 1:19; 2:18; 5:10; 7:13; 9:22; 18:12; 19:38; 20:19) than for the ordinary People of God. (Jn 7:48-49) To be sure, Christ's relations with the Pharisees were not exclusively polemical. Some Pharisees warn him of the danger he was courting; (Cf Lk 13:31) Jesus praises some of them, like the scribe of *Mark* 12:34, and dines several times at their homes. (Cf. Lk 7:36; 14:1) Jesus endorses some of the teachings imparted by this religious elite of God's people: the resurrection of the dead, (Cf. Mt 22:23-34; Lk 20:39) certain forms of piety (almsgiving, fasting and prayer), (Cf. Mt 6:18) the custom of addressing God as Father, and the centrality of the commandment to love God and neighbor. (Cf. Mk 12:28-34)

2196. In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and 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." (Mk 12:29-31; cf. Deut 6:4-5; Lev 19:18; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28)

The apostle St. Paul reminds us of this: "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, '*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,*' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom 13:8-10)

Sharing and Discussion

1. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength in a practical, everyday sense?
 - 1a. Which part of yourself do you feel most naturally drawn to express in loving God—your heart, your soul, your mind, or your strength?
2. How does the love for God, influence and shape one's love for others?
3. What role does forgiveness (of self and the other) play in loving your neighbor as yourself?

Closing Prayer

All: God of blessing, you promised a great light for the people who sit in darkness. Receive our prayers that we might be bearers of light for the church and the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

**Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom
Every Wednesday
Time: 8 – 9.30 pm**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwdTY3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

**Meeting ID: 276 007 3734
Passcode: 1WordOfGod**

All are welcome!

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References:

- (1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible
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