



LOVE MATTERS – Season Gratitude & Giving Week 1: October 31, 2021

Through the Gospel of Mark, in the closing days of the liturgical year, the message from Jesus is clear: Love is our calling – all in - heart, soul, mind, strength. All the Commandments, all the lessons of Discipleship and Stewardship are at the core, matters of the heart. This is fitting Scripture to enter into the season of gratitude and giving. We thank God for all our blessings, and we express that in many different ways.

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time Deuteronomy 6:2-6 • Hebrews 7:23-28 • Mark 12:28-34

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.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

FIRST READING: To the faithful Jew, this is a summary statement of Israel's beliefs called the "Shema Israel" ("Hear, O Israel"). It is akin to what the Creed is to Catholics. The Shema also proclaims Israel's call to love God with all her heart, soul and mind—with her whole being. Later in Deuteronomy (DT 7:9), Moses reflects: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands." If the people are faithful to God, they will experience a long and good life.

SECOND READING: Hebrews highlights the singular character of the priesthood of Jesus and the sacrifice he offered. The author insists that Jesus' eternal priesthood is superior in every way to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant.

GOSPEL: Jesus is asked which of the commandments is the greatest. His response links two Old Testament texts: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Both texts joined together are a summary of the whole law. Our response to a God who loves us unconditionally must be total. Linking love of God to love of neighbor is distinctively Christian.

DISCUSSION – COMMANDMENTS, COVENANTS OF LOVE

The Great Commandment of Love is the focus of the first reading and the Gospel. Jesus tells us that the true disciple is one who lives the greatest commandment. Moses speaks of the covenant of love; Jesus, the high priest, is the new covenant of sacrifice.

- The blessings of God have two conditions: (1) we who are blessed by His kindness love Him, and (2) we keep His commandments." Can you command love? Can love and obedience go hand in hand? *Here's what one Bible scholar says: Scripture says He is a loving Father, and Moses refers to what He promises to do as a "covenant of love." Once you really know God, you will love Him, and when you love Him, you will find it easy to comply with His demands. And when you do that, you begin to walk in obedience to what God wants, trusting the Father's heart when you cannot see His hand*

- Do you differentiate covenant vs. contract? *Moses called God of the Covenant "the faithful God." And what does faithful really mean? Simply put, it means that the one who promises something performs—not because of the praise he gets, not because of the money or reward he might get in return, but because of the integrity of His heart. His nature compels Him to keep His Word. For us, it is a desire of the heart to do the will of God – love, serve, sacrifice.*

- We love because God has loved us first. We love our neighbor because we can't love God unless we love those made in His image and likeness.

Consider the close people in your life who have claims on your love. Are there ways in which you withhold your love from them?

What about others: Are you generous with your love? What hinders you from loving your neighbor? How difficult is it to go beyond singular acts of love to develop relationships of love? To make true sacrifice – to love with all your heart, mind, soul, strength? Pope Francis outlines the challenge:

*"Today's Gospel passage invites us all to be projected not only toward the needs of our poorest brothers and sisters, but above all to be attentive to their need for fraternal closeness, for a meaning to life, and for tenderness. **This challenges our Christian communities: it means avoiding the risk of being communities that have many initiatives but few relationships; the risk of being community 'service stations' but with little company, in the full and Christian sense of this term.**"* Pope Francis, Nov. 2018

STEWARDS OF LOVE PRAYER

Gracious and loving God,
You call us to be the stewards of Your abundance,
the caretakers of all You have entrusted to us.
Help us always to use Your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously.
May our faithful stewardship bear witness to the saving love of Christ in our lives.
We pray with hearts overflowing with gratitude,
in Jesus' name. Amen.

*References include
AscensionCatholic.net;
Saint Louis University Liturgy*