

# Scripture Study

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time—Cycle B



## Opening prayer

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

(Psalm 18:2-4,47,51)

Hebrews 7:23-28

**Mark 12:28b-34**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- Last week we heard about blind Bartimaeus in Jericho (Mark 10:45-52). We now fast-forward two chapters later. Jesus is now in Jerusalem and in the midst of his opponents, the scribes, Pharisees, and Saducees; it is after his triumphal entry (on Palm Sunday, Mark 11:1-10) and before his Passion (Holy Thursday, Mark 14:12ff).
- The scribes were the scholars and intellectuals of Judaism. Their scholarship was the knowledge of the Jewish Law, which they regarded as the sum of wisdom and the only true learning. Their position in the Jewish community was a respected position of leadership.
- Jesus was a threat to their influence which is why most New Testament references show them hostile to him. This Sunday's story is unique in that it portrays a friendly, rather than a controversial, discussion between Jesus and a scribe.
- This particular scribe has been impressed with Jesus' earlier reply to the Saducees, another religious group that opposed Jesus (Mark 12:18-27). This scribe wants to learn more.

## Questions:

- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, we are told that Christ, our High Priest, is sinless and perfectly holy. What does it mean to be "holy"? In what respect can you call all priests *holy*? In what does their holiness consist?
- In the Gospel Reading, why are these two commandments (verses 29-31) the greatest? How do the Ten Commandments relate to these two?
- Why do you think Jesus emphasized loving God with our heart, soul, and mind? How is loving God related to loving other people?
- What do you think Jesus meant by telling the scribe that he was "not far" from the kingdom of God? Was Jesus commenting on his understanding of theology, or his faith?
- In the three possibilities of love relationships (with God, neighbors, and self), where are you the strongest? The weakest?
- What does it mean to love your neighbor *as you do yourself*? How do you love yourself? How does that apply to the way you love your neighbor?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 202, 228, 2196, 2816-2821**

## Closing prayer

*'Whoever does not love does not know God.' Why? Because 'God is Love.' (1 John 4:7) What more can be said, my Brothers? If one did not find one word in praise of love through this epistle, nor the least word throughout all the other pages of Scripture, and we heard only this one word from the voice of the Spirit of God: Because 'God is Love,' we should seek for nothing more. -St. Augustine*

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!**

# "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength"

**Scripture:** 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.

**Meditation:** What is the purpose of God's law or commandments? The Pharisees prided themselves in the knowledge of the law and their ritual requirements. They made it a life-time practice to study the 613 precepts of the Old Testament along with the numerous rabbinic commentaries. They tested Jesus to see if he correctly understood the



law as they did. Jesus startled them with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. What does God require of us? Simply that we love as he loves! God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. God loved us first and our love for him is a response to his exceeding grace and kindness towards us. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God. The more we know of God's love and truth the more we love what he loves and reject what is hateful and contrary to his will.

What makes our love for God and his commands grow in us? Faith in God and hope in his promises strengthens us in the love of God. They are essential for a good relationship with God, for being united with him. The more we know of God the more we love him and the more we love him the greater we believe and hope in his

promises. The Lord, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new freedom to love as he loves. Do you allow anything to keep you from the love of God and the joy of serving others with a generous heart? Paul the Apostle says: *hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us* (Romans 5:5). Do you know the love which conquers all?

*"We love you, O our God; and we desire to love you more and more. Grant to us that we may love you as much as we desire, and as much as we ought. O dearest friend, who has so loved and saved us, the thought of whom is so sweet and always growing sweeter, come with Christ and dwell in our hearts; that you keep a watch over our lips, our steps, our deeds, and we shall not need to be anxious either for our souls or our bodies. Give us love, sweetest of all gifts, which knows no enemy. Give us in our hearts pure love, born of your love to us, that we may love others as you love us. O most loving Father of Jesus Christ, from whom flows all love, let our hearts, frozen in sin, cold to you and cold to others, be warmed by this divine fire. So help and bless us in your Son."* (Prayer of Anselm, 1033-1109)

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