

Weekend Readings & Reflections

October 30-31, 2021 – Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection: *Love is only law we are to live by. And love is the fulfillment of the Law that God reveals through Moses in today's First Reading (see [Romans 13:8–10](#); [Matthew 5:43–48](#)). The unity of God—the truth that He is one God, Father, Son, and Spirit—means that we must love Him with one love, a love that serves Him with all our hearts and minds, souls and strength. We love Him because He has loved us first. We love our neighbor because we can't love the God we haven't seen unless we love those made in His image and likeness, whom we have seen (see [1 John 4:19–21](#)). And we are called to imitate the love that Christ showed us in laying His life down on the Cross (see [1 John 3:16](#)). As we hear in today's Epistle, by His perfect sacrifice on the Cross, He once and for all makes it possible for us to approach God. There is no greater love than to lay down your life (see [John 15:13](#)). This is perhaps why Jesus tells the scribe in today's Gospel that he is not far from the kingdom of God. The scribe recognizes that the burnt offerings and sacrifices of the old Law were meant to teach Israel that it is love that God desires (see [Hosea 6:6](#)). The animals offered in sacrifice were symbols of the self-sacrifice, the total gift of our selves, that God truly desires. We are called today to examine our hearts. Do we have other loves that get in the way of our love for God? Do we love others as Jesus has loved us (see [John 13:34–35](#))? Do we love our enemies and pray for those who oppose and persecute us (see [Matthew 5:44](#))? Let us tell the Lord we love Him, as we do in today's Psalm. And let us take His Word to heart, that we might prosper and have life eternal in His kingdom, the heavenly homeland flowing with milk and honey.*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time. Let's begin in Prayer:

All: Holy Spirit, lead me to the wisdom today that unlocks the path to God's will for me in the large and small choices of my life so that in all my thoughts, words, and deeds, I might give glory to God. Amen

Leader: *When we doubt God's plan, our lives tend to become much more complicated. We try to get God to prove to us that he is real. But, a friendship with the Lord isn't meant to be so dramatic and tumultuous – it is meant to be a gift that brings us true peace and joy. The Pharisees attempt to prove their fidelity to God through rigorous observance of the Law so that they can be "pure." What Jesus has come to reveal, however, is that true purity is within the interior, within the heart. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross will fulfill the Laws of Moses, so that we can attain purity through him. Obsession with the externals inevitably made it nearly impossible for the Pharisees to recognize and reverence Jesus as the true Messiah. They were always doubting and questioning him, and they failed to embrace the Kingdom of God because of it. We can fall into the same trap of thinking that the Kingdom of God is simply about fulfilling a list of duties, when in actuality, it is about the depth of our love of God and neighbor. As we watch the video, think about those things that are preventing you from truly loving God. Ask Jesus to show you the places in your life in which you could love God and neighbor more perfectly, so that you can embrace the Kingdom of God more deeply.*

Simplicity

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, simplicity is a component of veracity, and veracity itself is a sub-virtue of the cardinal virtue justice. Justice is the virtue to give what is owed to another, and veracity the virtue that helps us to live justly. Simplicity helps us to preserve the truth in our lives, and detach ourselves from complicated, duplicitous acts. When we give up dramatic complexity and live simply, then we are able to see the truth clearly, which in turn compels us to live according to that truth – the ultimate truth revealing that God is God, and we are to love him with our whole being, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time \(Year B\)](#))

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."

The Book of Deuteronomy (second law) is a summary of God's teachings to help guide God's people as they leave the desert and enter their new and promised home-land Israel. Moses reminds them they have been looked after and loved so beautifully that the only proper response to God is to return love. 'Love your God with all your heart'.

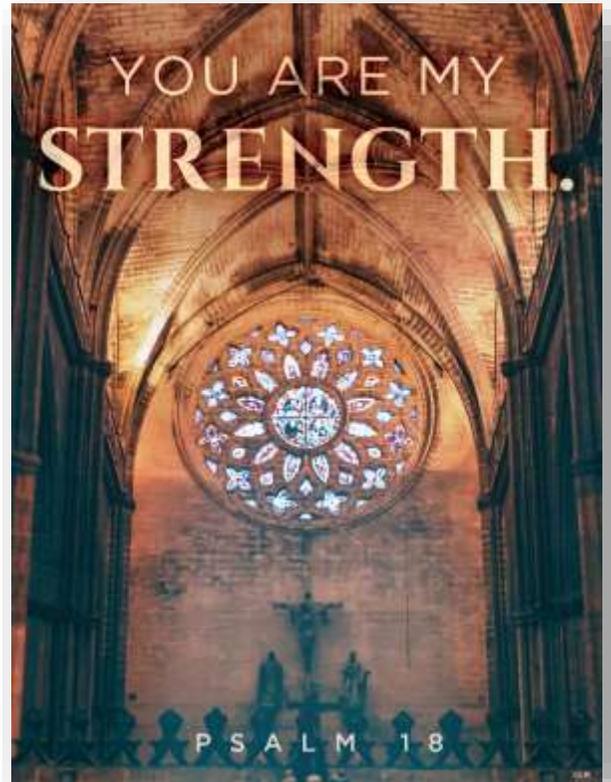
- Have you taken into your heart God's love and care for you? What does "to love God with one's whole being" mean to you? What is it that hinders you from loving God with your whole mind and heart? What hinders you from loving your neighbor? Jewish people still treasure this 'command' to hear and remember. Devout Jews wear this prayer in little prayer containers (phylacteries) on their wrist and forehead, pray it morning and evening, and have a container at the doorway of their home which they touch to remind them to love God who loved them.
- How could you be reminded of God's love each day? Where could you put a crucifix so that it is a daily visible and touchable reminder as you come and go in and out of your home?

SECOND READING ~ 2 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.

The Letter to the Hebrews is written for Jewish Christians who are struggling and tempted to return to the practices of the temple, the laws, the sacrifices. Jesus is shown to be the true and perfect high priest who will never die and whose sacrifice on the cross forgives once and for all.

- Do you ever think something else needs to be done to forgive you? Make you acceptable? Do you find yourself holding God's love at arm's length until you become perfect by your own actions? What practices or traditions do you long for that used to make you feel well?



• **GOSPEL** ~ Mark 12:28b-34 ~

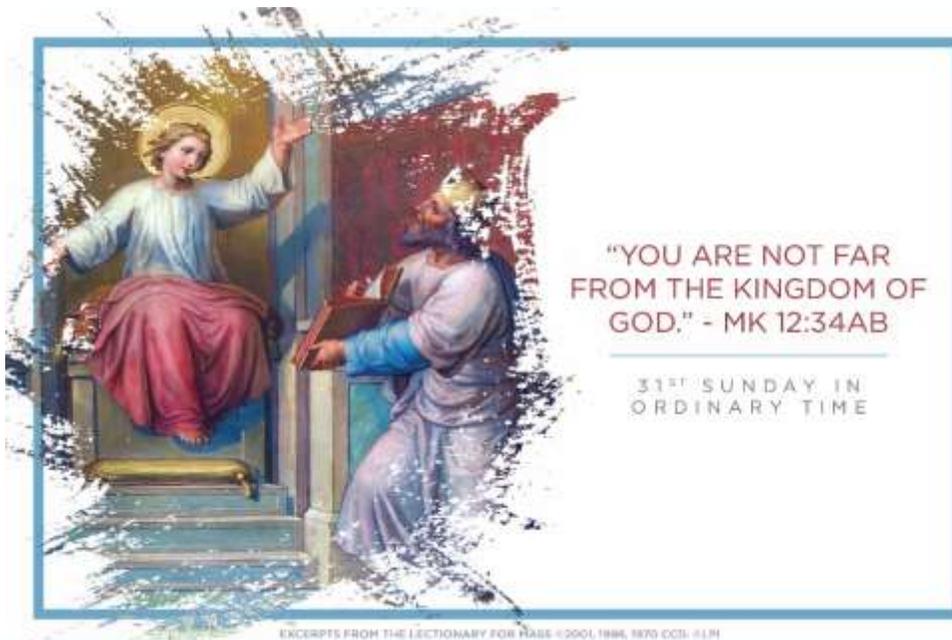
One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The 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.

Jesus is now in Jerusalem. He has chased out money changers from the Temple, had arguments with Pharisees and Scribes. Today a frequent faith question is discussed. Jews believed that 613 laws were developed from the 10 commandments. Living all these laws put one in right relationship with God. Scribes who were teachers of the laws especially to the younger generation were often asked: Make it simple? Which is the greatest? Jesus quotes from Dt 6, 4 (1st Reading) but also adds Lev 19,18 – care of the poor (check out Lev 19.9-17). 613 becomes 2.

- *How do you move from love of God on Sunday to love of God on Monday? Do you find it easy to separate love of God from love of neighbor? How do you see this in your life? In the Church?*

The Prophets of the Old Testament constantly pointed out the ease at which people worshipped in the temple with burnt offerings and sacrifices but did not love their neighbor shown by helping others in need. Love of God draws me into a relationship with all whom God loves. God painfully wishes our love to be extended to lift up the lowest and forgotten in society. Imagine entering a home for dinner and saying nice words at the table. Upon leaving the house, kicking the children and scratching the host's car. The scribe agrees with Jesus. But Jesus says things are still incomplete: you are not far from the Kingdom of God. Close but not there yet! Your head is on board but is your life going to truly show direct action linking God AND Neighbor?

- *The crowd stayed silent. Why? What would it involve to actually live and love neighbor as your own flesh and blood?*
- *What part of the Gospel stood out the most for you? How can you put this into practice?*



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).

- *What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God? To love as God loves?*
- *How can we cultivate God's love so that it grows in us?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray a spiritual communion ...

ALL: My Jesus, I believe that You are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to possess You within my soul. Since I am unable at this moment to receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as being already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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