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## 31st Ordinary Sunday - 31 October 2021

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# 31 October 2021

## Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Joe Tedesco

### Introduction

We can all, at times, find ourselves unsure how to commit to the calling of God in our lives; where to place our priorities and how to order our values. We are invited to follow the example of the scribe in today's Gospel and put our questions to Jesus; what matters the most?

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you teach us to love God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength.

Lord, have mercy.

You call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. Christ, have mercy.

You draw us into the kingdom of God. Lord, have mercy.

### First Reading

#### Deuteronomy 6:2–6

“You shall love the Lord your God”. These words are among the most treasured of the Hebrew scripture, always at the forefront of the Jewish faithful. Through a deep and devoted love of God, the people can experience tremendous blessing.

### Second Reading

#### Hebrews 7:23–28

Again, the reading from Hebrews reminds us that, in Christ, we have a perfect high priest who will never pass away. Christ is the promise fulfilled of a God who is always present to us.

### Gospel Reading

#### Mark 12:28–34

As we see a number of times in the Gospels, Jesus is among those attempting to make sense of God's law, what matters and what is of lesser concern.

## Reflection

As we have journeyed through Mark in this liturgical year, we have come accustomed to the brash yet dense nature of the texts. Mark writes with a frankness and brevity that gets to the point quickly. What is made clear, in this case, is the eminence of 'the greatest commandments'. The point is made through an exchange between an inquisitive scribe and Jesus. A simple question is put to Jesus in verse 28: "what is the first of the commandments?" We assume here that the first and the greatest are synonymous, and in a sense they are. The unfolding exchange suggests as much. However, the use of a number matters, it is no accident. The disputation among the relative worth of the commandments was a major concern among Jews of the day. There were literally hundreds of decrees considered 'commandments' (the rabbis counted 613 from the Torah), and there was much deliberation on how, when and where one applied them. This led to debates on the relative value or order of importance that particular commandments had. The order mattered not only because it helped interpret their application when they might, for example seem to clash but, also, because the order provided a lens through which the others were seen.

Thus, the first commandment, the quote taken from Deuteronomy 6 as appearing in our first reading, places acknowledgment, love and devotion of God front and centre, the greatest of the commandments. Everything else is only going to make sense if this commandment is honoured and obeyed.

Those of us who are more steeped in the Christian tradition may sometimes get caught up in various disputations both public and private. We may see things differently from others and even bemoan how some part of our Church does not value one principle, teaching or practice as much as we think it should. Perhaps we wished people were more reverent in worship, perhaps we think that the Church does not pay enough attention to the poor, perhaps we feel certain teaching is being sidelined when it should be elevated and given more prominence, perhaps certain practices that seem antiquated need updating, or maybe we're the opposite, sure that traditions long held are not being valued as they should. This goes along with wanting the best from and for the faith and is not inherently a bad thing. Further, there are times and places where it is appropriate that such concerns be drawn out. However, we are reminded here in this Gospel reading that any order and value we place on things always has a 'crowning commandment'. Without it all else, regardless of how noble a notion it is, falls out of order or, to put it colloquially, goes 'out of whack'.

Another important teaching found in this reading is learnt not from Jesus but from the scribe. Unlike the equivalent texts in Matthew (22:34-40) and Luke (10:25-28), the scribe here is presented in a more positive light. In the other synoptic gospels the scribe is seen to test Jesus, attempting to trip him up as it were. Here the scribe comes with admiration of Jesus and appears to be genuinely concerned with his opinion. By the end of the exchange the scribe is honoured by Jesus, pointing out that he is in fact "not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34).

Thus, we too, should have an attitude of honest questioning of Jesus – frank yet respectful, engaging and open to what Jesus has to say. Especially when we feel defensive of this or some other concern in our beliefs or practices, we might focus less on what we think and more on what Jesus has to say. Offering our thoughts and opinions to Jesus is a good thing no doubt (the scribe in this exchange does just this), but respectful deference to Jesus’ teaching is always a good way to navigate any deliberation.

Returning to the ‘greatest commandments’ themselves, we notice that we are required to use the plural. This contrasts the question as put to Jesus that is in the singular “which is”. Ancient Greek is quite a technical language and there is no denying the singular pronoun *estin*. The Scribe does not ask for the best two, or few, but which is *the* first. Jesus answers with one then, without pause, launches into ‘the second’; “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (taken from Leviticus 19:18).

We might think, given that the order seems to be important, that Jesus is just pre-empting things a little, offering the next ‘cab off the rank’ so to speak. However, at the conclusion of the full answer offered by Jesus states that *together* these are the greatest commandments. The theological inference is well established but is still easily missed. We cannot love God and not have a love of neighbour and, concurrently, we cannot love our neighbour and not our God. We can only do both or neither.

Last week we heard of Jesus curing Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. This week Jesus is offering us to further improve our vision. To return to our earlier metaphor of these ‘first commandments’ being lenses through which we see all other teaching and practice, Jesus is suggesting that we are most certainly bifocal creatures. Like lenses in seeing glasses, we need both to be in if we are to see with clarity. We must love God *and* we must love our neighbour. Before attempting to make sense on how we are to live our lives or what principle or teaching needs most attention, we must be viewing things through such lenses.



# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

We know that God is the rock where we take refuge. Therefore, we offer these prayers in faith.

## Petitions

We pray for all Christian people; may we, renewed by Christ's grace, commit ourselves to loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul and strength.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for world leaders. May they have the capacity to see the needs of their people with wisdom and act with justice towards other nations.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all baptised into the Priesthood of Christ; may we be reminded that Christ is the one High Priest and always seek to serve the Lord in whose priesthood we share.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all baptised into the Priesthood of Christ; may we be reminded that Christ is the one High Priest and always seek to serve the Lord in whose priesthood we share.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our own community that we will learn see through the eyes of Christ and love our neighbour as ourselves.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who suffer illness and grief. May they be able to see the face of God through the kindness of their neighbours.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

We bring these prayers to our Father through the power of the Spirit and in the name of the one eternal High Priest, Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva**

### **GA**

A new commandment. Anon. 318  
Alleluia, sing to Jesus. W. Dix. 371  
Lord of creation, to you be all praise. J. Winslow. 423  
Love is his word. L. Connaughton. 462  
This is my will. J. Quinn. 465  
Ubi caritas. Gregorian Chant. 319  
Ubi caritas. Taize. 324  
Where there is charity and love. R. Connolly. 323

### **AOV1**

Alleluia, sing to Jesus. W. Dix. 191  
Gather us together. O. Alstott. 111

### **AOV2**

Praise to the Lord. C. Winkworth. 132

### **AOV4Kids**

Alive and aware. K. Bates SM. 20  
Praise and thanksgiving. Traditional. 31  
We are children of the living God. K. Sherman CSJ. 15  
We want to live like you, Jesus. S. Wolf. 32

### **CWB**

A new commandment I give unto you. John:13:34, 35. 615  
This is my will. James Quinn SJ. 842

### **CWBII**

*Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions*  
A new commandment. John 13: 34,35. 443  
Alleluia! sing to Jesus! William Chatterton Dix. 449  
Lord of all nations, grant me grace. Olive W. Spannaus. 542  
This is my will, my one command. James Quinn SJ. 626  
Where there is charity and love. Paraph. Richard Connolly. 638  
Where true charity is dwelling/Ubi caritas est vera. Trans. ICEL. 639

### **S&S1**

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus. William Dix. 97

## **Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy**

Psalm 17: *I love you, Lord, my strength.*  
Psalm 17: Richard Proulx/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 436  
Psalm 18 (17): Jenny O'Brien. JOBB pg. 105  
I love you, Lord: Tony Alonso LPB pg. 172

## **Music selections by Michael Mangan**

Love God, love each other (LCC Children) [Gathering, Gifts, Sending]