

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Mighty God,
there is no one
greater than you.
Put in our hearts
a deep love for you;
teach us how to pray,
and guide us always
to do what you wish.
We ask you this
through Jesus Christ,
who is God with you
and the Holy Spirit,
forever and ever.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

The focus of our readings is “love of God and neighbor.” Because our society tends to trivialize the word “love,” we are apt to miss the profound nature of this teaching in our two readings. The introduction to this commandment in Deuteronomy is a radical call to faith in one God—a notion known only to the people of Israel. Precisely because there is only one true God, they are commanded to give total, unconditional love to God. For the Hebrew, heart, mind and soul are not three separate faculties, but rather the total person. Jesus combines this total, unconditional love of God with the love of neighbor. It is with this same love of mind, heart and soul, that we are commanded to love our neighbor. The focus comes from the conclusion Jesus draws—there is no greater commandment; nothing, no sacrifice, substitutes for it.

FIRST READING: *Deuteronomy 6:4-6*

This is a reading from the prophet Jeremiah from the book of Deuteronomy.

Moses said to the people:

“People of Israel, listen!
We have only one God.
And you must love God with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your strength.
And you must keep these words
which is my commandment in your heart!”

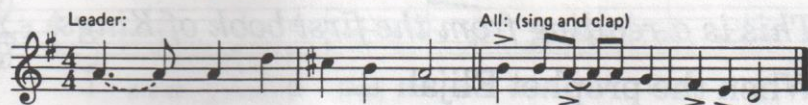
This is the Word of God.

RESPONSE: *Psalm 18*

I love you God, for you are my strength. You are my God. I
give you my praise. praise. You are my God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

Leader: All: (sing and clap)



1. Love God with all your heart: Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!
2. Love your neigh - bor as your - self: Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

GOSPEL: *Mark 12:28-34*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Mark.

One of the teachers of the Jewish law came to Jesus and asked him,

“Which one of the commandments is the most important?”

Jesus said,

“The most important commandment is this:
You must love God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind
and with all your strength.

And the second most important is this:
You must love your neighbor
the same as you love yourself.”

The man who asked Jesus the question said,

“Teacher, you are right.

We have only one God.

And we must love God with all our heart,
all our mind, and all our strength.

And we must love our neighbor
as we love ourselves.

Doing this is more important
than anything else we could do for God.”

Jesus was pleased with what the man said,
and he told him,

“You are very close to the reign of God.”

This is the Good News of the Lord.

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS WITH CHILDREN:

At first glance this may seem a simple Gospel to reflect on with children. But, remembering that children take our words very seriously and often literally, we will want to exercise caution. I recall a vivid experience with this very text. After hearing Sister say that we “must love God more than anyone,” one little girl went home crying.

Finally that evening, after much prodding, she told her parents that she thought God didn’t love her because she loved them (her parents) more than she loved God. And quite naturally so! Fortunately, the parents were very understanding and had the kindness to tell Sister what happened. When she shared this with the rest of the faculty, it was a learning experience for all of us!

With this caution in mind, let us proceed to our reflection on the Gospel. Rather than dwelling on “how much” we love God, we might explore with the children ways which we show our love for God.

- in our prayer,
- at Mass,
- at home,
- with others,
- by telling others about the good things that happen (instead of the bad),
- by having a joyful disposition,
- by showing gratitude for God’s gifts,
- by showing respect for the things God created and using them respectfully.

We might also explore how we show our love for our neighbor. The children will be able to make many suggestions. The Minister of the Word will want to keep the children focused on ways they can show love of neighbor which are truly possible for them. For example, they *cannot* feed the hungry of the world, but they *can* share their goodies generously with others. They *cannot* make global peace, but they *can* work for peace in their families and with their playmates.