

All in Through the Grace of God
October 31, 2021, Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 12:28-34
Fr. Brad

The question, *'Which commandment is the first of all?'*, posed by the scribe in our Gospel today, cuts to the chase. Here we find a scribe who has allowed himself to be **impressed by Jesus**. His response transcends the political concern of pleasing the group of people he is publicly perceived as being a part of.

Somehow the scribe's **response is from his own heart**, apart for the rally cries of his peers who are trying to trap Jesus in order to be perceived as the ones in control. He must have been pondering Jesus' message for some time because his question does not come across as an interrogation question to test Jesus but as an honest inquiry.

This episode also details one of the very few episodes in Jesus' ministry where **Jesus himself** singles out and **affirms publicly** a particular person who belongs to a group he routinely reprimands for their blind self-interest.

The first great commandment and the second *'to love each other as one loves oneself'*, go so **tightly hand in hand** that the scribe could not find any 'yeah buts' about it. In fact, the scribe adds the observation that *'this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.'* There was nothing else to do but agree. It is such an all-encompassing statement. How is this even possible - to love God with our entire being, given our human frailty and limitations?

A few points to remember:

God loves us all unconditionally but what is our response to this reality? Do we love God? A great indicator of that is how we treat others and ourselves. We can offend against others and ourselves.

A fundamental aspect to our following Christ is to **keep both commandments in mind**. We cannot live one authentically without the other. By practicing the second, we can mature into the first. And authentically practicing the first leads us naturally into the second.

To profess the first is pretty hollow if we try living it out without the second.

Looking more closely at the second:

To **love others**: doesn't mean we have to like them or even agree with them but means we must always have their best interests in mind. It may mean sacrificing our likes and dislikes in order to accomplish this. Our emotions must not control us. It's easy to love someone we like. **It requires self-sacrifice to love someone we don't like**. Can we see as 'child of God to child of God' even though we cannot see 'eye to eye'? This is where **we depend on Christ who shares the Spirit of Love**, the Holy Spirit with us. We are called to be partakers in that Spirit. We need to honour the first commandment.

Also, to 'love others as we love ourselves' entails we **love ourselves**: sadly many do not love themselves. We live in a world where much shaming goes on in so many ways: **body image**, intelligence level, mental health status, gender struggle, ancestry, financial and social status, physical mobility status. In a world that encourages and respects certain statuses over others, these particulars have the power to engage that small **negative voice** that nags us that we are not good enough. Vulnerability to this negativity is part of the human condition and needs to be recognised and overcome.

To accept the way God created each of us and to recognize we need to take good care of ourselves, **is a sign of maturity**. Remember we don't have to earn or deserve God's love for Him to love us. But do I let God love me?

To authentically live out the second commandment, we must **anchor ourselves in the first. Bask in His love**. It is **God who equips us** to carry out the second in the first place. To acknowledge this publicly as the scribe did, evoked a positive and encouraging response from Jesus.

It is **not about the particular talents** one brings to the world **but** about the wholeheartedness of love, **a willingness to give it all away**. Even amidst defeats and failures, **the great saints abandoned everything into the care of God**. As **Jesus** Himself demonstrated first hand during his ministry, his every teaching and action was based on **what the Father asked of him, no matter what he was feeling at each moment**. He gave his life out of loving obedience to his father and his compassionate love for each of us. He personifies the two greatest commandments alluded to today.

We are hereby once again **invited to give ourselves away for God's purposes**. The fear is that we might give up too much of ourselves. Why? Because then **WE are then no longer in control and we don't like that prospect**. It is in faith we give ourselves over to the one who knows and loves us better than any one else. He is the one who gave us ourselves in the first place **SO HE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT WE NEED** to complete us. And there is a freedom in knowing that. It frees us up to fail without giving up on ourselves or others. The grace and wisdom that accompanies such surrender helps us let go of foolish thinking and patterns of behaviour (about ourselves and others) that are prideful, selfish, frivolous, fearful, divisive, and ultimately unhelpful. If we could only understand that the divine love of God desires our fulfilment, a fulfillment only possible through God's grace. **Nothing is taken away from us but is transformed and revitalized**.

Pope Francis has called on the faithful around the world to answer the call to '*walk with each other*' through a process of synodality. In ever new ways and in broader circles we are being called to find new ways to mutually enrich each other through conversation, education, and accompaniment - - particularly relevant during these pandemic times and with the need for greater dialogue and healing among our indigenous peoples, new Canadians, refugees, and all the oppressed and the abused. May we grow in mutual understanding and in acceptance of the great diversity of people and circumstances in our world.

Through God's grace, may we reflect Christ's love in the world by our own following of the two great commandments. Amen