

Father John's Gospel Reflection



GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 4th November 2018

**Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Mark 12: 28-34)**

This is the first commandment, and the second is similar to it.

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must 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 must love your neighbour as yourself. There is not commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken said. You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him anymore.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

1. In these two laws Jesus gives us is the truth of freedom. Freedom not to attempt to be our own god, but the call to worship the true God.
2. The second gift is the call to live in freedom by selfless loving-service of others.
3. Let us be like this scribe and delve with Jesus into the meaning and practical implementation of his teaching.
4. Like Jesus, we must positively engage and interpret our long-held church traditions in the light of new circumstances.

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Jesus, not unexpectedly, find himself in a hostile setting. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem is followed by his cleansing of the Temple- undermining the validity of the Temple, the centre of religious and political power in Judea.

This passage is surrounded by stories of antagonism between Jesus and many different segments of Jewish leadership. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Herodians- all unlikely allies, attempt to trick Jesus with their provocative questions. But now in 28-34 only one individual approaches Jesus. Here finally is a scribe who sees beyond the restrictive boundary of his tradition; he appreciates the wisdom of Jesus. He observes that when Jesus replies to his critics, he really does not directly answer their questions- his answers are ambiguous and cryptic.

It seems to me here, we are learning a lesson both from the scribe and from Jesus. The scribe becomes a teacher and is there to "test" Jesus. The question of the scribe concerning the first commandment leads Jesus to recite the Shema- words which are still recited daily by persons of the Jewish faith. This text from Deut 6:4-5 is expanded by Jesus to include "with all your mind." Jesus then adds to his response another passage from Lev 19:18, "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." Consistent with his constant teaching, Jesus deems an inner disposition as more important than outward displays of religiosity.

It must be said that Jesus is not preaching something new and unique. His teaching is consistent with Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8, and the prophets who speak of the priority of justice, kindness, humility, and service to the needy. What Mark present us with is a Jesus who is firmly planted in his own Jewish tradition, albeit a particular interpretation of that tradition. For within first century Judaism there were multi-faceted traditions, Jesus does not reject Judaism, but emphasises a certain understanding of the many threads of Judaism.

John Boyd-Boland ofm