

Homily O.T. Sunday XXX1 Year B Mk 12:28-34

God is good! All the time!

All the time. God is good!

The central message of today's readings is the most fundamental principle of all religions, especially Christianity. **It is to love God in Himself and living in others.** Scripture readings for today remind us that we are created to love God by loving others and to love others as an expression of our love for God.

I could stop right now with that as that is the central tenant of the message today as well as the core of Christianity! But let's go a little deeper.

"Which is the greatest commandment?" the scribe asked Jesus. The response from Jesus, the Word made flesh, is taken directly from the Hebrew prayer, the Shema, which is in Deuteronomy Chap 6, 4-9.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (And these words that I command you today shall be on

your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deut. 6:4-9)

Jesus then adds, quoting Leviticus 19:18, "The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus said, "There is no other commandment greater than these." This is because all the other commandments are explanations of these two. The Ten Commandments are based on the principle of reverence for God and respect for others. Hence, the first three Commandments instruct us to reverence God, His Holy Name and His Holy Day, and the remaining Commandments ask us to respect our parents and to respect the life, honor, property, and good name of others.

The Shema is the fundamental statement of the Israelite religion! This is the commandment Jesus identified as the most basic. In a way, everything in the bible and Christian life is a footnote to the Shema. From it follows a basic a moral imperative: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.” Pious Jews have recited the prayer in the morning and before bed for centuries. The Christian practice of morning and evening prayer follows from this custom.

They were to recite it as their last words before dying.

They were to drill the words into their children.

They were to carry a parchment containing these words.

The Shema was central, unavoidable, and indispensable to daily living!

So, what does Shema mean? “Shema” the first word in the prayer means “Listen!”

She-Ma Yis-ra-El; Hear O Israel.

The second line is:

Ahdo-Nai Eh-lo-Hey-noo, Ah-do-Nai Eh-KHAD.

(the) Lord (is) our God, (the) Lord (is) One.

The Shema holds huge importance to Christians! We recite the Creed every day which contain the words “I believe in one God...” With that prayer, we devote our lives to God.

But how do we do this – devote every single minute to God?

God is not competitive with things in our daily lives within the world or even in the universe.

God lies behind and shines through all things!

The secular world around us lures us and wants us to think we are autonomous, and self-directed. We hear people who say they are their own law. They tell us what they think and what their values are. But this is not the assumption of the bible!

The opening line is “Shema” – Listen!

Adam did not listen!

Abraham, founder of Israel, heard the higher voice beyond himself.

Shema-Listen!

By listening then, how do we love God? There are several means by which we can express our love for God and gratitude to Him for His blessings, acknowledging our total dependence on Him. We can keep God's commandments, and offer daily prayers of thanksgiving, praise, contrition, and petition. We can also read and meditate on His word in the Bible and prayerfully attend Mass like you are doing today and every Sunday! If I am going to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, then I am going to have to place His will ahead of mine. This a difficult thing for me to do as I am pretty selfish! This means that I will have to say no to some things that I might want to do. Another challenge for me! Ultimately, this means that I will have to make seeking the Lord's will, and then doing it, paramount in my life. Taken together, loving God means we open our hearts, give Him our will, develop our minds, direct our emotions, use our bodies and deploy our resources in ways that reveal our love for Him in active, loving service of Him in Himself and Him in everyone we encounter.

There is a true formula for joy in this life: In English, we speak in what is known as "person." If I am referring to myself, I will say, "I am." That is known as the "first person." If I were speaking to you, I might say, "You are." That is the "second person." Then, if I were speaking of another, I might say, "He is." That is known as the "third person." In English, we always have self first. However, in Hebrew, it is just the opposite. First Person says, "He is"; Second Person says, "You are"; Third Person says, "I am." -- Therein is contained the formula for joy in this life. If we will learn to place God in the first person, others in the second person and if we will be willing to take the third person, then we will have our lives in order. The true formula for joy is: J – Jesus, O – Others, Y - Yourself). (SNB Files).

Now secondly, loving our neighbor: Since every human being is the child of God and the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, we are actually giving expression to our love of God by loving our neighbor as Jesus loves him and us. This means we are to help, support, encourage, forgive, and pray for everyone without discrimination. If I am going to love my neighbor as

I love myself, it may cost me as well! I may have to seek forgiveness when I think I have done no wrong. I may have to sacrifice something I think I need to meet a brother's or sister's need. I may have to give up time to help someone. I may have to spend time in prayer for people, go to them, and reach out to them in the name of the Lord. I may even have to pray for someone I don't like! But that is what Jesus is challenging us to do.

There is a great story of a village blacksmith who had a vision. An angel came to him and said, "The time has come for you to take your place in His kingdom." "I thank God for thinking of me" said the blacksmith, "but as you know, the season of sowing the crops will soon be here. The people of the village will need their ploughs repaired, and their horses shod. I don't wish to seem ungrateful, but do you think I might put off taking my place in the kingdom until I have finished?" The angel looked at him in a wise and loving way of angels. The blacksmith continued his work, and almost finished when he heard of a neighbor who fell ill in the middle of the planting season. The next time the blacksmith saw the angel he pointed out towards the barren fields and pleaded with the angel. "Do you think

eternity could hold of a little longer? If I don't finish my job, my friend's family will suffer." Again, the angel smiled and vanished. The blacksmith's friend recovered, but another's barn was burned down and a third was in deep sorrow at the death of his wife. And the fourth... and so on... Whenever the angel appeared, the blacksmith just spread out his hands in a gesture of resignation and compassion and drew the angel's eyes to where the suffering was. One evening the blacksmith began to think of the angel and how he had put him off for such a long time. He felt very old and tired, and he prayed "Lord, if you would like to send your angel again, I would like to see him now." He'd no sooner spoken than the angel appeared before him. "If you still want to take me," said the blacksmith, "I am now ready to take my place in the kingdom of the Lord." The angel looked at the blacksmith, and smiled, as he said, "Where do you think you have been living all these years?" (Jack McArdle in *"And That's the Gospel Truth"*).

That story leads us to some questions we can ask ourselves on a daily basis: Is my love for God all that it should be? Do I pray to Him as I



should? Am I in His Word as I should be? Are there people or things that have crept in and taken over first place in my life? Is Jesus somewhere down the line after some person, some thing, or even myself? What about my love for others? Is it all it could be? How loving am I to the members of my family, to my neighbors, to the members of my parish community? The answer to all these questions will help us to better focus our love for God in our daily lives.

I am going to close with a homework assignment. One, spend some time each day this week reading the Shema in Deuteronomy, Chap 6, 4-9 and see how you can apply it your life. The other is to take stock of your neighbor and what his or her needs are.

God is good! All the time!

All the time, God is good!

AMEN!

References:

Bishop Robert Barron, Sunday Oct 31 Homily

Fr. Tony Kadavil Homilies for O.T. 31

Magnificat, October 2021

Loose Leaf Lectionary, October 31, 2021