



31st SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME ***YEAR B – November 4, 2018***

In the Gospel today (Mark 12:28B-34) Jesus answers the question of a Pharisee, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” He quotes the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 6. Our Lord’s words are found in our first reading today (DT 6:2-6). They are part of a daily Jewish prayer called the Shema. If you google that word, you will find the following:

“*Shema* (“hear”) is the Hebrew word that begins the most important prayer in Judaism. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4, which begins with the command to “Hear.” The whole Shema prayer, which includes verses 4-9, is spoken daily in the Jewish tradition:

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.

Later Jewish tradition developed a three-part Shema prayer that also included Deuteronomy 11:13–29 and Numbers 15:37–41. Tradition states these three parts cover all aspects of the Ten Commandments.

The Shema prayer was so influential and important that Jesus used it as the beginning of His answer to the “greatest commandment” question in Mark 12:28–30:

When Jesus began His answer with the Shema prayer, He acknowledged the Lord God as most important and that complete devotion to Him is the most important of the commandments. It is no surprise that the scribe replied this way in verses 32–33:

You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Even today, Christians can look to the words of the Shema as a wonderful expression that the Lord is the one true God. As we acknowledge His lordship, our response remains to “hear” Him, love Him with all our heart, soul, and might, and love our neighbor as ourselves.”

The word for that kind of love is “agape”. It is the giving of one’s self to another, without expecting anything in return. It is the way God loves us and the way he asks us to love him. On a continuum between ‘SELFISH’ and “SELFLESS”, where is your love for God and Neighbor right now?

