

## 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

### GOSPEL

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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 no 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 him 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 any more.

(Mark 12:28-34)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The first commandment that Jesus quotes is the great Jewish prayer known as the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Even today, this prayer is recited each morning and evening by practising Jews.
- In traditional Jewish practice, the Shema is written on a slip of paper and placed inside the mezuzah, a small box beside the front doors of Jewish homes. Each time a person passes through the door, they touch the mezuzah in a symbolic action of reciting this great prayer. It is a way of reminding themselves often during the day of God's greatness and their obligation to love him.
- The second commandment quoted by Jesus comes from Leviticus 19:18. Both commandments are part of the Torah or Law.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus is often in conflict with the leaders or elite of the Jewish people. This text is quite a contrast. This scribe came to Jesus to question him, probably seeking to entrap him in some way. Instead, the scribe sees that Jesus has a clear understanding of what God requires of us. The great commandments to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself summarise all the requirements of the Law of Moses. The scribe rightly sees that it is in the actions of loving God and neighbour in our daily lives that we really respond properly to God's call. This is more important than the legalistic requirements of worship in the temple, with burnt offerings and sacrifices on the altar. Because of his agreement with the vision of Jesus, the scribe is declared to be 'not far from the kingdom of God'.

- What next step do you think the scribe needs to take to come close to the kingdom of God?
- In what concrete and observable ways can you put your love of God and neighbour into practice each day?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What for you is the greatest aspect of your faith? What does it mean to love God with all our heart, understanding and strength? What does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves?
- Reflect on what were the most important rules or standards in your family when you were growing up. How have those values influenced what is most important to you as an adult? Has there been any change in what you value most? Share your reflections.
- Take on the challenge this week to love God more fully and your neighbour as yourself!
- Use today's psalm as an affirmation of faith:

*I love you, Lord, my strength,  
my rock, my fortress, my saviour.  
My God is the rock where I take refuge;  
my shield, my mighty help, my stronghold.  
The Lord is worthy of all praise:  
when I call I am saved from my foes.*

