**Love the Lord your God** Nov 3, 2024 Mk 12:28-34

* Today’s gospel reading in the 12th chapter of Mark represents a significant change from what we would normally get concerning Jesus’ encounters.
* So much of Jesus’ teaching is as a result of Him responding to the Pharisees or other religious leaders who were continually attempting to trap Him with their questions.
* Today, that is not the case.
* In spite of the many times the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Teachers of the Law were attempting to trap Jesus by asking questions such as the ridiculous situation where a widow hypothetically married seven brothers who all died, then who would she be married to at the Resurrection?
* Or, is it right to pay taxes to Ceasar or not?
* Today we have a genuine and sincere question.
* It is good sometimes to hear a response that comes from a real honest and sincere question, such is today’s gospel reading.
* We read where one of the Teachers of the

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Law came upon the scene & heard the wisdom in Jesus’ previous answers & asked Him a very serious & sincere question: “***Of all the commandments, which is the most important?***”

* We may think of only the ten commandments, but reality was that these commandments were expanded upon into hundreds of rules & regulations in an attempt to have a rule for every situation of living.
* It was the profession of the Scribes (teachers) to interpret the law in all its many rules & regulations.
* The question he asked Jesus was one that was often a matter of debate in the rabbinic schools, & he was sincere in asking it.
* Jesus began His response with what is known as the Shema: “***Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord***.”
* That single sentence is the real creed of Judaism.
* It was the sentence with which the service of the synagogue always began & still begins.

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* And then Jesus combines that sentence with the pronouncement to love God & neighbour: “***Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength***.”
* And “***Love your neighbour as yourself***.”
* This is the summary of the law – not only of the ten commandments, but of the hundreds of rules & regulations that the scribes had expanded the ten commandments into.
* ***There is no commandment greater than these***. Jesus said.
* Not only that, Jesus also said that this commandment to love summarizes all the other commandments.
* If Jesus places such an emphasis on this commandment to love, I believe it is something we should pay attention to.
* How do we fulfill this great commandment? (How do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind & strength, & how do we love our neighbour as our self?)

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* Is it about what we do?
* Is it about what we say or what we feel?
* Is it even possible to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?
* This is such a deep and profound question that we may even be reluctant to explore it, but because it is clearly described as the summation **of all of** God’s commands and laws, I believe we should at least attempt to unpack it.
* Today’s commandment is presented as a single commandment; however, I believe there is a progression necessary in understanding it.
* I don’t think it is possible to reach out and love our neighbour or even to love ourselves according to this command unless we can first of all say that we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind & strength.
* But how can we say that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?
* Is it in our attending church once a week – our worship – our prayers – our good

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works?

* Are we loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength when we make a huge contribution to outreach through the Christmas shoeboxes or provide food baskets in the community?
* The reality is that all of these ways of desiring to please God, through our worship, our prayers and our outreach are indeed expressions of our love for God, but I think you will agree with me that none of them are complete such that we can say that they represent loving God with the entirety of our hearts, souls, minds or strength.
* Jesus said that this is the greatest commandment of all, and yet I think it is obvious that it is impossible to keep.
* It may summarize all the commandments, but just like the old law or the ten commandments, it is impossible to keep.
* Especially when we look at Jesus’s teachings from the Sermon on the Mount.
* *Anyone who is angry with his brother is guilty of committing murder or anyone*

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*who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

* Did Jesus set us up to fail with this new commandment?
* I don’t think so – Jesus said:
* ***“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*** (Matt 5:17)
* The only way that we can fulfill this commandment, or any of the other commandments, is to be in relationship with Jesus Christ.
* Love is one of the most frequently used words in the Bible (right after the word Lord), but I will limit my focus today to its use in the first letter of John.
* In the 1st letter to John we read three statements about God’s love
* We read that “***God is Love***” (1 Jn 4:16).
* Then we read: “***This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***” (1 Jn 4:10)

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* And we read: “***We love because he first loved us.***” (1 Jn 4:19)
* Our ultimate love for God is simply realizing and acknowledging God’s love for us, and that can only be done by receiving that love through having a relationship with Jesus.
* Jesus is the one who died to free us from the law, and save us by grace. All our failings and all our shortcomings have been taken care of by him at the cross.
* It’s like putting a key piece in a jigsaw puzzle – how do we love God or our neighbor?
* The key piece is that we come to him in Jesus, and we come in humility.
* We cannot approach God by who we are, we can only approach God because of who Jesus is. It has nothing to do with our ability to keep the commandments.
* To please God and to love God is to receive Him in our lives.
* It is to grasp the depth of his love for us.
* It’s not about how we may feel or what emotional state we may be in at any given

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time

* Basically to love God means that we must be open to receive His love for us.
* The ultimate expression of God’s love for us is Jesus Christ
* When we are able to grasp the immeasurable love God has for us through sending Jesus to die for us, then our response will be to **want** to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
* We will however fail because we can never, ever, measure up to the Law; so we do not need to beat ourselves up when we fail.
* Rather we take our shortcomings to the Lord, and confess our sins, our inadequacies, before him.
* And because He is just and true, He will step in that gap.
* We will stand in His righteousness, whether we deserve it or not.
* That is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, a Gospel of grace and not of Law.
* Also, it is only in relationship with Jesus

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that we will realize our value, our self-worth – how much we are loved by God.

* Only then can we love ourselves properly.
* To surrender ourselves in relationship with Jesus is to love God as much as we are able.
* The deeper we grow in that relationship, the more we will be able to love God in fulfillment of His commandment, and it will not be a burden because that is really our true destiny – the longing of each of our hearts.
* St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) gave us that wonderfully well-known statement: “***Our hearts are restless, O God, until they find their rest in Thee***.”
* And when our hearts are turned to God in such a love relationship, we discover that we can’t help but care for and love our neighbor as well.
* We began with the question, “***How do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?***”
* The answer is to allow God to love us

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and to live in that love.