

31st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Mark 12:28-34)

YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE REIGN OF GOD

Which is the greatest commandment in the law?
A scholar asked Jesus this only to show,
His superior knowledge on the vast subject,
And to trap Jesus with a well thought out test.

Pharisees had tried hard to prove Jesus wrong,
They would not trap Him even if they tried lifelong.
He beat them with answers they would never grasp
For them, this was a humiliating slap.

Sadducees and Pharisees were full of conceit,
With arguments, Jesus they could not defeat.
They were not really looking for right answers,
In trapping Jesus, they could not be losers.

As scholar, he knew the greatest commandment,
But wanted to find fault with what Jesus said.
They were looking for reasons for His arrest,
Until they had Jesus, they would never rest.

“To love one God with all your heart, soul and mind,”
Jesus answered the young man reading his mind.
To love your neighbor as yourself comes second,
On these two, He said, all other laws depend.

If you truly make God your first choice in life,
And love all your neighbors as you love yourself,
You will be living by the first commandment,
And you'll experience a sense of fulfillment.

QUESTIONS:

1. Are you happy with your life?
2. How often do you pray?
3. How personal and sincere is your love for God?
4. What makes it difficult for you to love your neighbor?

REFLECTIONS:

The Pharisees and the Sadducees grew restless day by day as Jesus continued to grow in honor and popularity. He became a threat to their unchallenged position in the society. No one dared to contradict them, nor did anyone challenge them. They wanted to stop Jesus at any cost but were not sure how. They tried to trick and trap Him by asking Him questions, hoping to find fault with what He said. They were trying to get controversial answers from Him so they could accuse Him and justify a possible arrest. In short, they tried everything to trap Him.

One day, they asked Jesus whether they should pay tax to Caesar. This seemed like the perfect trap. If He said they should pay tax, He would go against the religious sentiments of the people. If, instead, He told them not

to pay, He would go against Rome. Jesus brilliantly handled the situation by asking them to show Him a denarius. Taking it in His hand, He asked them whose image and inscription the coin had. They answered Him saying that it was of Caesar. He then told them to give to Caesar what belonged to him, and to God what belonged to God (Matthew 22:17). Jesus silenced them with His smart answer.

The Sadducees also posed a question to Jesus. They wanted to know whose wife a woman would be if she had married seven brothers and all of them died without having children. He answered them, "You err because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For at the resurrection, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage but will be as angels of God in heaven." The Pharisees did not give up. This time they brought a lawyer who asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. If asked with good intentions, the question would have been justifiable. Because there were six hundred and thirteen different commandments. Jesus answered the question by quoting the Old Testament: "Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy, 6:5). Jesus said to him, "This is the greatest and the first commandment." The second, He said, was "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Probably, His detractors realized by then that they would not be able to trap Jesus with questions. They were no match for Him. Therefore, they would accuse Him of treason in order to have Him arrested, tried, and crucified.

If men and women, God's masterpieces of creation, had lived by this greatest commandment, the world would have been totally different. There would be peace and harmony everywhere. Justice and equality would have been the order of the day. There would be no poverty in the world, and all would be living in love and friendship. A sense of universal brotherhood would prevail and there would be no differences of caste or color. Unfortunately, we can only dream of these situations. We are living in a world of division and wars, where the gap between the rich and poor is ever on the increase. Man, who subjugated the universe and brought about tremendous developments in the world, is living in fear today. The only reason for this pathetic situation is that man refuses to give God His due. From the moment God created man, he has rebelled against his Creator in order to make himself equal with God. This rebellion continues even today. Every effort is made to silence God and remove Him from the lives of people. Today people are singing, "glory to man in the world," rather than "glory to God in the highest." Greed came into the world with man's fall. A greedy man is angry because he is never satisfied with what he has. This is a disorder because of the unrecognized need for God translating into desire for created things. As a result, 80% of the world's wealth is in the hands of less than 20% of the world's population. This explains why poverty is rampant in the world. Money has become a god for many and there is no limit to their craving for more. The more they get, the more they must have.

Love of God and love of neighbor go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other. The way you love your God is the way you love your neighbor. In other words, if you do not love God, you cannot love others. If you say you love God but do not love your neighbor, you are lying. Love of God should inspire and motivate you to love your neighbors. Therefore, if you truly say you love God, it goes without saying that you love others as your brothers and sisters. Love of God has two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. This means love of God should reflect in our love of neighbor. The closer you get to God, recognizing Him as the Giver of all you have, the easier it becomes for you to see others as God's children. If we are children of God, we are also brothers and sisters to one another. Our life is only a pilgrimage and is temporary. Life here on earth is not eternal. Intellectually, people have no problem admitting this, but practically, man chooses to live as if he is permanent and that nothing will ever stop him.

Self-love is not selfishness. Self-love is an acceptance of who God is and that we are all God's children. Self-love is also acceptance of who we are with our strengths and shortcomings. We are called to love ourselves in as much as we are to accept ourselves as we are. Our ability to accept ourselves is the precondition for us to accept others. Most of our problems are because we have not accepted ourselves completely. There is a portion in each one of us that we have difficulty to accept. Herein lies most of our problems. We can accept others only to the same extent that we accept ourselves. It may be a very useful exercise for each one of us to

examine those areas of life in which we have difficulty with acceptance. I remember a girl who was excellent in many things but was totally unable to accept the fact that she was very short in height. This is just an example. I knew of another high school girl who could not accept that she was born a girl. She wanted to be a boy instead and to compensate she would always wear boys' clothes. You may find many such things in your life. An examination of your life is the key to discovering yourself. The greatest discovery is self-discovery. There are many people who are afraid of self- discovery because they will not be happy with what they discover. The more you accept yourself, the more you love yourself. And the more you love yourself, the more positive will be your self-image. Let me end with a question: As of today, are you happy to be yourself?