

## The Lord Is Our God, the Lord Alone

**Deut. 6: 2-6; Ps. 18; Heb. 7: 23-28; Mk. 12: 28-34**

In the First Reading for this Sunday, we encounter the great Jewish prayer, the *Shema*. *Shema*, in Hebrew, means 'hear' and so we have the words of the prayer: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.'

Moses said these words to the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. He knew that he would not be going with them so he wanted to leave them with the *Shema* to remind them of the God who had protected them as they came out of Egypt and wandered in the desert for so many years. He told them to love God with every fibre of their being, holding nothing back. Thus, these words have become the very essence of the Jewish religion.

In the Gospel, a scribe asked Jesus a question: 'Which commandment is the first of all?' to which Jesus replied by quoting the *Shema*. In saying this, Jesus drew the Jewish and the Christian faiths together. But then He added a second commandment: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

The scribe was very impressed with Jesus' answer and gave his affirmation when he said: 'You are right, Teacher'. When we first read this line of Scripture, we might think: Who does this scribe think he is? Who is he to give his stamp of approval to Jesus, the great Teacher, the Son of God? But we need to remember that, to the scribe, Jesus was just another Jew but one who seemed to know the Hebrew Scriptures very well since both of the commandments came from the Torah (Deut. 6: 5, Lev. 19: 18).

Then the scribe said: '...this (the two commandments) is much more important than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' And Jesus replied: 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' since the scribe had revealed his true wisdom; wisdom that went beyond what he had learned simply by reading the Torah. He knew that loving God and loving neighbour were the most important things in life and superseded any offerings and sacrifices; any demonstrations of piety in the synagogue.

This is the message for each of us. To love God totally and without reservation is the greatest commandment. It tells us that we must not put anything ahead of love of God; not wealth, not power, not prestige, nothing. If we have learned nothing else during this time of pandemic, we know that all of the material things that we tend to hold dear can be taken away or they can be rendered useless in an instant.

The second commandment, to love our neighbour as ourself, completes the first commandment. If we think of everything that has been in the news lately, we can readily see that the negative news items have directly resulted from us not adhering to the second commandment: the George Floyd death, the January 6th insurrection in Washington, the missing and murdered Indigenous women, the residential school issues, to name a few. We have far to go before we can say that we are loving our neighbour as ourself.

St. Basil the Great said this: 'The one who loves the Lord also loves his neighbour and the one who loves his neighbour also loves God, since God accepts the favour as conferred on Himself'. Let us continue to strive to keep the greatest commandments so that we will be 'not far from the kingdom of God' Let us pray that, through our faith in Jesus and by the grace of God, we may receive our promised inheritance, everlasting life in heaven.