

Thirty First Sunday of Ordinary Time-B

Mk 12:28-34

Dear Friends,

In his response to the Scribe's question, Jesus begins with the phrase, "**Hear O Israel!**" (Mk 12:29) With these words Jesus places his response within the biblical tradition. These three words enlighten Jesus' statement on love of God and love of neighbor. First of all, he places his response in the context of Israel's call in which God has taken the initiative of divine love. God loves us first. The second consequence of Jesus' words is the invitation to listen. Listening is the surest way into the mystery of God's love.

The first part of Jesus' response about the love of God was very familiar phrasing. It was just as well-known to the average Jew at the time as the sign of the cross is for today's Catholic. Jesus, however, adds to that familiarity the call to love our neighbor. Jesus is beckoning us into a community of love. The love which is initiated with God must be returned not only to God but that love needs to include our neighbor. In this way, we are brought into a community of rooted in this divine love. Here the love is flowing from God to us and to our neighbor and back to God.

This brings us to my favorite description of the Bible. It states that the Bible's message is simple: God is love and Jesus teaches us what love is. In listening to find love and wisdom, our quest draws us to Jesus.

Jesus teaches us who God is and how God loves. In our encounter with Jesus, we experience the compassion and mercy of God. In Jesus, we learn that there are no limits to God's love, no fences or labels of exclusion. In Jesus, we listen to God and

hear the cry of the poor and marginalized along with the forgotten who are isolated in ways only the broken human heart can develop. In Jesus on the cross, God's word lays before us a challenge to put everything and everyone in second place so we **"love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... you shall love your neighbor as yourself."** (Mk 12:30-31)

All four of the Gospels are the richest symphony of God's love song that is Jesus. In the Gospels, we hear the call to respond to our daily reality with a heart that is open and receptive. Being open to life gets us in touch with Jesus. We will confront the limiting and constricting boundaries of our selfishness. The needs of our neighbor will be set before us in a new clarity and urgency.

This love of God and love of neighbor is what our hearts were made for. However, this is not always what our hearts want. If we are listening to Jesus, we cannot avoid hearing the difficult message. Love means to lose our life to save it. Love means to seek to be the servant not the ruler. Love means to wash the feet of all. Love means to walk with Jesus to Jerusalem. Love means we win by losing.