

Cycle B 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 DT 6:2-6

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life.

Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!" Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

Responsorial Psalm PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.

I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Praised be the LORD, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The LORD lives! And blessed be my rock! Extolled be God my savior. You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading 2 HEB 7:23-28

Brothers and sisters: The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

Gospel MK 12:28B-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall 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 shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

“Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!”

This cry struck a deep chord in the sons and daughters of Israel. Throughout their long and turbulent history this cry always forced the Jewish people back to a consciousness of their origins and their national purpose. This was the cry of Moses when God first formed the Israelites into a nation. It was the First Commandment...and it was the re-forming commandment when restoration of Judaism was needed.

The Old Testament tells us there came a time when ideas and concepts about God and about who He was were attempted...but they failed because God is free to be who He is in His mystery and cannot be restricted by our human and limited concepts.

There came a time when the Jewish people saw God as exclusively identified with the Promised Land, with the land flowing with milk and honey. Only those living there were God's beloved. This led to religious elitism, the elitism of the Chosen. They saw God as having nothing to do with the Gentiles.

There came a time when God was identified by the Jews exclusively with their Temple in Jerusalem. God worked exclusively, they thought, through the Temple's priests. Eventually they expanded that and saw God's kingdom as present only through Jewish kings.

“Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!” was the constant cry of the ancient Jewish prophets, those men who called Israel back from its wayward ways to its original purpose, while recognizing that God cannot be limited by human concepts and images. He is limitless and human concepts cannot confine Him.

We are the Gentiles, descendants of those who shaped the culture of Western Civilization. Our Western history is filled with accounts of kings and queens who claimed they ruled by divine right. The British monarchy's history is one steeped in that notion, a notion so powerful and pervasive that the system of English Common Law, which our law is based on, was developed to protect the little people from the whims and tyrannies of British

kings and queens who acted as if they alone understood God's will. That's why our own Declaration of Independence grounds our dignity on rights that are endowed upon us by our Creator, rights that exist in our nature that were put there by God alone, not by any king, queen, president, congress, or court.

Accepting the Lordship of God means accepting His order of reality, His concern for all mankind, and the destiny He has put before us. God lives in His creation and above all lives in His creatures whom He made in His own image and likeness. Accepting the Lordship of God necessarily entails loving our neighbors. It means loving everyone as God loves us, caring for each other as God cares for us. As Catholics we share ourselves in the Eucharist because in Eucharist, we share the God who made us... the Body and Blood of God the Son Jesus, who in His humanity has been filled with God's divinity.

Jesus tells us that we are not far from God's kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit He tells us, we shall have freedom and shall not be shackled by our possessions. Blessed are you when men and women revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you because you hold to God's values. The Scriptures speak what we need to hear: *"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!"*

But we need not despair in the face of evil. In the past and even now there are forces around us that would twist and deform what God wants to do in our world. But we know through the prophets that all that has been de-formed can be re-formed. Despair and retreat into our own little world is the surest path to hell. Remember that despair is Satan's greatest victory. Despair is the hell in which Satan forever lives. But, accepting God's Lordship over us means accepting and living out His order and values in our world. We must never sell out and never give up. Our re-formation is possible only and unless we believe that it can happen because God is at work in our lives.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!"