

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIOINARY #152

READING I Deuteronomy 6:2-6

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy

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:"

Deuteronomy = dyoo-ter-AH-nuh-mee
or dyoo-ter-AH-nuh-mee

"Fear" is best understood here as awe
and reverence, rather than as being
terrified and afraid.

"Hear" calls the people to attention to make
sure they are listening. Today, we might say,
"Listen up." This implies a message of
importance is coming.

This is not a suggestion, but an imperative.

READING I

Today's reading follows the restatement of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Moses provides two reasons for keeping the commandments. First, doing so instills reverence for God. Second, the commandments enjoin correct action on the part of the Israelites. To follow the law is to reverence God in all aspects of life. Furthermore, if they keep God's commandments, they will prosper and inherit the promised land. The last section of the passage elaborates upon the first commandment to have no other gods, connecting it with the way

this is to be lived out. Beginning with "Hear, O Israel," the passage presents what is referred to as the *shema*, taken from the imperative of the Hebrew word *shema* ("hear"). The *shema* is the cornerstone of Jewish worship. Likewise, it is the central theme of Deuteronomy. The terms of the *shema* present the obligations of those who enter into the covenant with God. In return, prosperity will come to those who adhere to the terms of the covenant. The central verb of the *shema* is "love." This is the first time in the Bible that we see a reference to loving God. The act of loving

does not refer to an emotional attachment; rather, it reveals a proper attitude toward God that manifests itself through actions. To love God is to remain loyal to him. The *shema* exhorts the people to remain undivided in their devotion to God. There are three terms used to express how the people should love God: "heart," "soul," and "strength." While there are nuances distinguishing the terms, they each convey the sense of the entire person. The use of all three terms here encapsulates every aspect of the human person.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51 (2)

R. I love you, O Lord, my strength.
 I love you, O Lord, my strength,
 O Lord, my rock, my fortress,
 my deliverer.
 My God, my rock of refuge,
 my shield, the horn of my salvation,
 and showed kindness to your anointed.
 The LORD lives! And blessed be my rock!
 Exalted be God my savior,
 you who gave great victories to your king

For meditation and context:

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

READING II Hebrews 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,

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.

In the first reading, God's people are exhorted to act lovingly toward God. In contrast, today's second reading demonstrates God's loving activity toward us. Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice on our behalf. As the perfect and permanent high priest, Jesus tendered the perfect sacrifice, himself, such that there is no longer a need for any other offering. This salvation becomes the fundamental motivation for rendering worship to God. Our worship is both an internal and external expression of our love of God, as described in the first reading.

separated from sinners, [and] higher than the heavens." These aspects present a contrast to the list of characteristics ascribed to Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:3. Not only is Jesus' priesthood permanent, but it also exceeds the priesthood of Melchizedek. The reference to "the word of the oath" that appoints Jesus is an allusion to Psalm 110:4: "The Lord has sworn and will not waver: 'You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek.'" It is clear that the letter to the Hebrews views Jesus' priesthood as a fulfillment of Psalm 110:4.

Today's second reading focuses on priesthood. On one hand, there are the Levitical priests, who are like any other human being in that they eventually die. On the other hand, we are presented with Jesus' permanent priesthood, as he lives forever. Because of his divine nature, his actions are eternally efficacious in his defeat of sin and death through his perfect nature and salvific offering. Hebrews presents a description of Jesus' priesthood, listing five aspects in this passage. He is "holy, innocent, undefiled,

READING II

leitical = lĥ-vĭt-ĥ-k*1 = related to the tribe of Levi
 Highlight the contrast. The former type of priesthood is fleeting, while Jesus' office is neither provisional nor temporary. This is an important message to communicate to the assembly; we can always approach God through Jesus. Read the attributes slowly.
 Again, highlight the contrast between Jesus and the human high priests. "He" and "himself" refer to Jesus.

GOSPEL Mark 12:28b-34

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

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.

GOSPEL

The reading from Mark's gospel presents the *shema* heard in the first reading. The scribe's question stems from a sincere desire to understand the commandments. There are 613 commandments in the Torah, the Jewish name for the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus answers the scribe's question by reciting the *shema*, but he goes a step further. He also presents a form of the "golden rule" (as we call it now) as the second and greatest commandment. Together, the *shema* and the command to love one's neighbor as oneself are the foundation of

There is repetition here. Slow down at the end of the scribe's reply when new information is offered, at "worth more."

Why do you think the others were hesitant to inquire further?

Read the question with sincerity. As we will see, this scribe is not trying to trap Jesus but is genuinely seeking a deeper faith. These lines are well known. Read them reverently.

An interesting development in the dialogue between Jesus and the scribe is the scribe's added observation that the commandments are more important than burnt offerings and sacrifice. With this inclusion, the scribe demonstrates that action in and of itself is not sufficient to live out these commandments. Empty actions that check boxes but do not have real love motivating them is not what God wants from his people. Thus, one's disposition is important in living out the two great commandments. We must be genuine in acting out our love for God and neighbor. M.B.