

Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time October 31, 2021

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

² that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life; and that your days may be prolonged. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them; that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; ⁵ and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart;

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.

Second Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. ²⁵ Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever

Gospel: Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; ³³ and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any question.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Robert Munger wrote a helpful little booklet called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. In it he compares our lives to a house with many rooms. He raises the question, does Christ have access to every room (every area) in our life or only to those areas where we feel comfortable having him visit? Though written many decades ago Munger hit upon a phenomenon of contemporary society, the compartmentalizing of the various aspects of our lives. This tendency is also very present within the Christian segment of society and is often expressed by the position that "it isn't what I do that is important, but what I believe." Jesus, in this week's Gospel reading, does not accept this dichotomy. When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment, he replies, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Interestingly, Jesus characterizes our lives as having four segments, heart, soul, mind, and strength. Frequently, though, we do not love God comprehensively in this way but rather amplify our love for God in one of these four segments to the detriment of the others. And so, we find some that love devotedly but are weak on understanding, or others who have great knowledge about God, but lack deep love. Still there are some who express their love very emotionally while failing to attend to people's physical needs, and still others who go about doing all kinds of good but who have little interest in increasing their understanding. It seems like we all want to love God on our own terms and in the way we chose. Jesus teaches that this partial response is not sufficient. He repeatedly uses the word "all" to communicate that our love for God should encompass all parts of our being, all our affections, all our emotions, all our understanding, and all our actions. Then Jesus goes one step further and says that we should also love our neighbor, his creation, as ourselves. This type of love is an all-consuming love, beyond our capabilities, and requires the giving of all that we are to him. Munger challenges us in his booklet that instead of allowing Jesus to simply be a guest in our home [life] we should turn ownership over to him, giving Jesus both the deed and the key to our home [life]. This abandonment of ourselves in love to Jesus is both the beginning act of loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, and the means by which we will be able to love our neighbor as ourselves. The ability to love God with our all, inasmuch as it is beyond our natural abilities, requires yielding to the Holy Spirit, for the first fruit of the Spirit is love. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our mind and heart to increasingly understand the depth of the Father's love, and the extent to which it was expressed in Christ's incarnation and passion. For in the final analysis our ability to love God with our all is a reciprocal action that mirrors and reflects the extent to which we have grasped God's love. It is that love which compels us to stop living for ourselves and to begin living for Christ. St. Theresa understood well the compelling nature of love to change our behavior. "Perhaps we do not know what love is: it would not surprise me a great deal to learn this, for love consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything, and to endeavor, in all possible ways, not to offend Him, and to pray Him ever to advance the honor and glory of His Son and the growth of the Catholic Church. Those are the signs of love..." Without this compelling love, inviting Jesus to no longer simply be a guest in our lives but instead to live and rule there as the rightful owner, is very difficult. So, let us begin asking the Holy Spirit to show us the Father's love and to reproduce it in our hearts. We then will say with the Psalmist, "I love thee, O LORD, my strength."

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INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading

1. What is the reasoning God gives for our keeping his commandments? What do that reveal about God?

Second Reading

2. In your own words state what is the uniqueness of Jesus' priesthood, and how it benefits you.
3. How should the Hebrews passage affect your understanding of Mass?

Gospel Reading

4. What is the relationship, if any, between the first commandment and the second?
5. Which commandment is most difficult for you to keep? Why?
6. What is your first inclination, to love God with your heart, your soul, your mind, or your strength?
7. Since we no longer offer burnt offerings and sacrifices, how would you summarize the scribe's statement in verses 32-33, that to love God this way "is worth more than _____ (what)"?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.