

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Reading I

### Deuteronomy 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

### Psalm 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 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,  
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.

## Alleluia

### John 14:23

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord;  
and my father will love him, and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

# Gospel

## Mark 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.

# Exegesis

## Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Today's passage captures the Great Shema, which is the foundational creed of the Jewish faith, its central prayer and the first and greatest commandment. Our passage follows the great theophany of Moses on Mount Horeb and the Decalogue, the gift of the Ten Commandment on the two stone tablets. The Greatest Commandment is to be written on the heart and etched on the human soul.

Chapter 6 begins as follows: "These then are the commandments, the statutes and decrees which the Lord, your God, has ordered that you be taught to observe in the land into which you are crossing for conquest, so that you and your son and your grandson may fear the Lord, your God..." (Deut 6:1).

Our pericope begins in the middle of verse 2 where the above passage ends. Our passage begins with the exhortation to fear the Lord. The Hebrew word that we translate as *fear* is *yarae* which can mean craven fear as we think of it in English. *Yarae*, especially in the context of fear of the Lord can also connote a deep sense of awe and reverence and worship. For example, in both Joshua 22:25 and Leviticus 19:3 *yarae* is translated into English as *revere*. "Thus, your children would prevent ours from revering (*yarae*) the Lord." (Jos 22:25). "Revere (*yarae*) your mother and father and keep My sabbaths. I, the Lord, am your God." (Lev 19:3). My understanding of fear of the Lord is that of kneeling in awe and reverence before God as a creature before his creator.

The promise of God in our proper response to His Commandments is the gift of the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. This, of course, is symbolic of the gift of heaven, the gift of eternal life with God. Love is the foundational requirement for inheriting eternal life.

The Great Shema begins, "Hear, O Israel!" The Hebrew word that we translate as *hear* is *shema*, which is where the Great Shema gets its name. The word *shema* does mean to hear or to listen as the English word connotes. It can mean something much more than physical hearing or listening. It also means to heed or to obey. It can mean to internalize and integrate into one's being and assimilate into one's actions what one hears.

*The Lord our God is Lord alone!* The existing Jewish theology was profoundly monotheistic. The admonition here is the primacy of the Lord in our worship and devotion and in our lives. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *alone* is *ehad* which is typically translated as *one*. It connotes an inner unity within God, i.e., an absence of discord or division.

*Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God...* The Hebrew word that we translate as *love* is *ehad*. This is a word that in Hebrew implies a deep covenantal relationship. Mark and the other evangelists use the Greek word *agape* when they capture the words of Jesus quoting the Great Shema. *Agape* carries a much more descriptive image of the deep covenantal love that flows from God and is the source of all being. It describes absolute self-giving love.

*With all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.* This verse obviously captures the necessity of the totality of our human response. When Jesus quotes this text, He adds the phrase *with all your mind*, only adding to the totality of the response required by us. The Hebrew word for *heart* is *lebab*. In its usage in the OT, it has little to do with the physical organ. It has more of an understanding as the center of things or the unifying force. This would encompass both heart and mind as we know it. In Hebrew it is the seat of the human conscience. The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nepes*. The word originates in Scripture in the creation story in Genesis. It is the receptor of the life breath of God. Like the understanding of the heart, the soul is the depth of or the center of our being. As human beings we are a union of mind, body and soul, or intellect, will and Spirit. Our true selves and our ultimate strength lie in the unification of all three.



## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

Psalm 18 consists of 51 verses. It is entitled *A King's Thanksgiving for Victory*. The header continues as follows: "For the leader. Of David, the servant of the Lord, who sang to the Lord the words of this song after the Lord rescued him from the clutches of all of his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:" With this introduction Psalm 51 begins, presumably capturing the song of David after he was spared of his life by Saul. Another, or perhaps the original, version of this song of gratitude can be found in 2 Samuel 22:2-51 which celebrates the delivery of David from all of his enemies.

The entire Psalm exuberates gratitude and love. The song rejoices in the saving hand of God. Some of the key words from our selected passage are as follows: love, strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, stronghold, and savior. All of these words describe the strength and power and immutability of God. These powerful adjectives describing God reverberate throughout this song and in fact the entirety of Sacred Scripture. It flows from the experience of the power of God working in human history. It challenges us to recognize God as the source of blessings in our lives, the source of our strength, and to respond with love and gratitude.

### Hebrews 7:23-28

*Hebrews* reflects on the OT ritual priesthood, e.g. the priesthood of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of the Priesthood of Christ. Chapter 7 in the NAB is entitled *Melchizedek, a Type of Christ*. The OT priesthood held the priest to be a mediator between God and the people. The priest was called to mediate the Word of God to the people and to bring the prayers and sacrifices of the people to God. The priest typically was chosen from a family of priests, typically the first son. The king or the leader was considered anointed by God and served in the capacity of priest as well as ruler. All manifestations of OT ritual priesthood foreshadow, and are merely an archetype of the Great High Priest, Jesus the Christ.

Whereas the OT Priesthood served the Old Covenant, Jesus is the Priest of the New and Everlasting Covenant sealed with His own blood as the perfect unblemished Lamb of God. The OT priest entered the Holy of Holies once per year on the day of atonement to offer the animal sacrifice to God for his sins and for the sins of the people. OT priests died and were often replaced by their son(s). The priesthood of Jesus will never pass away. This is the fulfillment of the promise of Yahweh to establish an eternal priesthood from the lineage of King David (See Ps 110:4). There is only one Priest, Jesus the Great High Priest. The priesthood of the NT, of the New Covenant, calls for those who are called by God and ordained to stand in *Persona Christi*, in the person of Christ.

Likewise, the sacrifice offered daily on the Altar of the Holy Mass is a representation of the one sacrifice offered once for all. We no longer offer sacrifices for sin; we make present again the one Sacrifice of Calvary.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Mark 12:28b-34

In our Gospel passage today, Jesus is now in Jerusalem to face His Passion. After several attempts by the religious leaders to entrap Jesus, a scribe comes forward with seemingly good intentions. He asks Jesus a straightforward question about the greatest commandment. From the decalogue the religious leaders promulgated 613 specific laws that were imposed on the people and often not followed themselves. Of these laws that were codified in the Torah, 248 were positive in nature and 365 were negative in form. In a highly illiterate society, the memorization and adherence to laws of such magnitude were overly burdensome.

The question of the first or the most important commandment was not an uncommon debate among the faithful. Jesus responds by quoting the Great Shema. It was a prayer that every faithful Jew prayed at a minimum twice per day, morning and evening. It was inscribed on the phylacteries that the religious leaders wore on their heads and on the wristband around their wrists. It was a prayer that was carved on the doorposts of their homes.

Jesus quotes from the Great Shema in Deuteronomy 6, our first reading today. Jesus quotes the Shema word for word, but he adds phrase *with all your mind*. Several centuries have passed since the original Shema was reduced to writing. Perhaps the Hellenistic influences inspired this addition. Certainly, Greek Philosophy had elevated the importance of the mind and discursive thought. More likely the clarity of language is more of a factor. The Jewish notion of *heart* carried with it an understanding of will and intellect, a blend of heart and mind. Hellenistic thought more clearly differentiates heart and mind, specifically associating the heart with emotions and the mind with thought. The more precise language of the Greek NT simply translates the original Hebrew Shema with additional verbiage. In any event Jesus is describing the entire person just as in the original Hebrew text.

Jesus also adds a quotation from Leviticus 19:18b, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Jesus does not separate love of God from love of neighbor. Jesus said, "Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for Me." (Mt 25:40). When asked, "Who is my neighbor?", Jesus told the story of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:29-37). Our neighbor is the person nearest to us in need. We don't have to look to some distant heaven to love God, love the person who is next to you.

This Greatest Commandment is a necessary response to God who is Love. "We love God because He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." (Jn 3:16). God gives His all to us. Our response can be nothing less than our all.

## Reflection

I feel that for weeks the Word of God has been challenging us to contemplate our human journey. I mentioned that the journey of the soul through this time on earth is a sojourn of discovery; discovery of God, of our true selves and of our place in God's plan, ordained from the beginning of time. The journey is the same. As we discover God, we discover our true selves. As we discover our true selves, we discover God. In the process we discover our true place in God's economy of salvation.

God reveals Himself to us as a community of love. The Holy Spirit is the force of love that makes the Father and the Son one. The Holy Spirit is also the whirl of love that is not contained within God but bursts out into all of creation. When the time was right, God took the clay of the earth and breathed into the humus His life-giving breath, and man became a living being, created in God's image and likeness. God is being itself and out of love He chooses to share His life with us.

God so loved the world that He sent His only Son into our world to reveal Himself to us, to deliver His love, and to reveal who we are, His beloved children, brothers and sisters of Jesus. God gives His all to us in giving His life in His only Son. In our Gospel this weekend, Jesus challenges us to live out our true selves, bearers of His life and love to the world by giving our all. Just as Jesus is the enfleshment of God's love so are we called to be the incarnation of His presence. Like Jesus we are called to be recipient of and a channel of God's love in the world.

In our Gospel this weekend, Jesus echo's the great *Shema*, the greatest and the foundation of all of God's commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind and with all of your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." To give our all seems humanly impossible. We are finite creatures and to give our all would seem to leave nothing but emptiness. Secondly, our strength is limited. Our Psalm this weekend appropriately reminds us that God is our strength. When we try to give our all, we naturally fall short. When we allow God to love in and through us, our all, our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength, become infinite. When we empty ourselves and allow God to fill us with His spirit, we fulfill the purpose for which we were created and discover God and ourselves in the process. So, we pray, come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".



## Personal Witness

It has been said that participation in competitive sports can teach us many life lessons. My high school football coach always reminded us that football provided us players with a microcosm of life, learning hard work and challenges, successes and failures. He taught us how to respond, how to handle success and how to acknowledge and improve on our weaknesses.

I learned a valuable lesson early on in my football career. It was the middle of my freshman year. We were still undefeated. We were beating yet another team handily early in the third quarter. Apparently, it became evident to my coach that I was not giving my all. (I was not). He pulled me from the game, took me aside, grabbed my facemask and said: “Theoret, are you going to go through live like that, half assed? If you are going to play for me you are going to give me 110% on every play from the moment the ball is snapped until the whistle blows, I don’t care what the score is!” He sat me down for the rest of the game. Before the beginning of the next game, he asked me if I was ready to play. I said, “Yes, coach!”

That was a life changing moment for me. As I was recruited by college coaches, they recognized from watching films of my games that I played with a certain intensity throughout each play. To them it was noticeable and very important. The expression used by one scout was, “Your motor is always running.” It earned me a college scholarship.

More important is what I learned from the game. I experienced an amazing sense of fulfillment and even joy, win or lose, from leaving it all on the field. As the gun sounded at the end of the game, knowing that I gave everything that I had for the team, for the cause was euphoric.

In college, again midway through my freshman year, we were undefeated and about to face another undefeated team. Even though we had them on our home field, they were favored to win, as they were a larger school. There was a sense of intensity all week in practice. On game day, going through our morning rituals, there was total silence. In pregame warmups, again there was total silence. To my knowledge, no one planned this, it just happened. There was an intensity in the air that I had never experienced before. I could feel a oneness with my teammates that to this day I cannot fully articulate. I remember recalling an expression in the sports world, “Eye of the tiger.” I think that I was experiencing that. We were all a part of something bigger than ourselves. At that moment in time we were one.

As the game started, we again took the field in silence. The coach communicated with the quarterback, the quarterback called the plays, the defensive captain called the defenses, no one else said a word. Final score: home team 72 – visitors 0.

Years later I rediscovered that intensity, that oneness, in contemplative prayer. It was on an entirely different scale, of course. It was otherworldly. In surrendering myself to God, with all of my heart, with all of my soul, with all of my mind and with all of my strength I experienced divine love. I discovered that in total emptying of myself, dying to self, God enters, fills, and overflows. Love became effortless and seemingly limitless. I felt that I was at one with God, with myself and with all of creation. I believe that this is what Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper when he said, “Father, may they be one as You and I are one.” All we must do is give our all and we receive all, God!

