

TRINITY 22/ORD 31 – 2021

Deut 6:2-6

Heb 7:23-28

Mk12:28-34

Today's first reading contain the words of the Shema Prayer, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It is recited by all observant Jews twice daily and is the first prayer children learn. The Shema Prayer is a statement of faith, reminding Jews that they must love God with a strong, sincere and intelligent love.

The Shema Prayer also appears in the gospel reading. In St Mark's gospel story, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem and has had traps for him laid by the Scribes and Pharisees about the legality of paying taxes to Caesar and about the resurrection of the dead. These traps fail to trip up Jesus. Then a single Scribe asks Jesus if there is one law that is the basis of all other laws. Jesus responds by quoting the Shema Prayer so emphasising that worship of God cannot be shared with the worship of Caesar. Humans cannot serve two masters equally. As St Thomas More said before his execution, "I die the King's good servant, but God's first."

Jesus adds another law to the Shema found in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 19:17-18) about loving one's neighbour. If God is to be loved by our total self, then other humans are to be understood as being equal to ourselves – no more, no less. Below God there is no hierarchy of value among humans. Jesus made this very clear to James and John who wanted to sit beside him at the heavenly banquet. All humans are equal, only God is different. This is why Catholic teaching is Pro-Life, valuing all human life from conception to death.

The scribe affirms Jesus' answer by saying that obedience to these laws are more important than offering sacrifices and Jesus assures him that he is not far from the Kingdom of God. St Mark is stressing that the sacrifice that Jesus, the anointed servant of God will offer, will make the sacrifices offered in the Temple unnecessary.

The Epistle to the Hebrews points out that the Jewish High Priests who offered the sacrifice of the Atonement have died and were replaced. They were only human, but Jesus is different. He is God's Anointed who will lead humanity out of total bondage to evil so that our loyalty to God can be undivided and so we can lead an ethical life of loving our neighbour in the way we love ourselves.

The sacrifice of Jesus is central to our faith. It is re-presented by both priest and people during Mass. We cannot repeat Jesus' sacrifice but we can enter into the sacrifice that Jesus offered and so able to receive the love, mercy and forgiveness that God offers us through it.

This is why the way we must worship is important. Our worship must be focussed on God, not on ourselves or even the parish community. This is easier if the priest and people face the same way than if the priest faces the people. In recent weeks as you know, two diocesan priests have concelebrated mass with us. You may be interested to know that both their responses were that the mass is one which can be prayed so the sense of God's holiness is real. At the recent Plenary gathering here in Australia it was the baby boomers who were

wanting to reform the structures of the Church, its worship and its attitude to the world. Young adults said they want prayerful God centred worship, stakes in the sand and a leadership that stands firm in the catholic Faith. Only when God is the object of our love can we possibly love others as equal to ourselves.

But here is the crunch. We cannot possibly love God unless we have experienced and recognised his love for us, just as we cannot love other humans unless we have experienced the love of others. So we must get our relationship with God right and then we can enable others to recognise that love through the way we show them love.

So, today's readings urge us to "Walk the walk, talk the talk and live the love."

Msgr Harry Entwistle

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