

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time **Father Ed's Homily**
Theme: The Greatest Commandments are Love for God and Love of Our Neighbor

Every year we celebrate Vocation Awareness Week. This year, it's November 3 through November 9. During this Vocation Awareness Week, we pray to the Holy Spirit to renew the Church with more vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life, especially for our diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. For me, each and every one of us is a vocation promoter/recruiter. I consider it as our Christian duty to ask our children, nephews, nieces, cousins to please consider responding to God's call to serve Him and his Church as a priest, a deacon, or a religious. It is one of the best ways to respond to God's love by becoming a priest, a deacon, or a religious. I am very grateful for your continued prayers and financial assistance to our seminarians and all those in the formation houses.

In today's Gospel reading according to Mark, Jesus tells us the greatest Commandments are the Love of God and Love of our Neighbor. These two are inseparable. The love of God first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God. Mark tells us one of the scribes approached Jesus with a question: "WHICH IS THE FIRST OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS?" Remember, the Jewish people have 613 Commandments, so this Scribe wants to know which one of these 613 commandments is the first, I think for him, the most important one. Jesus answered him: "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." Jesus reminded him and all of us that there is no other commandment greater than these. Jesus' answers emanated from a combination of two Old Testament quotations, namely Deut 6: 4-5 and Lev 19. 18. The first quotation from Deuteronomy is referred in Hebrew as "SHEMA." The Shema reads, "HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD ALONE." Shema is a declaration of Faith in one God which formed a Daily Prayer for every devout Jew. They pray it faithfully, every morning and evening. You heard in the first reading that Moses made a reference to this Shema to his people if they want to prosper and have a long life. The Shema goes with the love of God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It means, when it comes to your love of God, there must no division, your love must be total/complete for God alone.

Jesus, the greatest Jewish teacher, gives them a new teaching, namely, the love of God and one's neighbor are inseparable. For Jesus, unlike Jewish teachers who limited love to one's neighbor, to his/her fellow Jew, Jesus extended it to every child of God. Since we were all created by one God in his own image, we are all his children, hence we must love God and one another. This explains very well what Jesus says in 1 John 4: 20- 21: "THOSE WHO SAY, I LOVE GOD, AND HATE THEIR BROTHERS OR SISTERS, ARE LIARS. FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE A BROTHER OR SISTER WHOM THEY HAVE SEEN, CANNOT LOVE GOD WHOM THEY HAVE NOT SEEN. THE COMMANDMENT WE HAVE FROM HIM IS THIS: THOSE WHO LOVE GOD MUST LOVE THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS ALSO."

Fellow parishioners, these readings are very applicable and relevant for us today also. Our world needs this Love that Jesus pointed out to the Scribe and to us also. As Jesus reminds us in John, how can we say we love God whom we do not see but have no love for our brother/sister we see every day? We do know at times that it is very difficult to love as Christ loves us, especially for those who do not love us as we love them. As followers of Christ, we do not have any alternative if we want to be his true disciples. With prayers and patience, God will give us the grace and wisdom to love as his Son loves us, those who do not love us.

Again, we have Jesus Christ, the High Priest, as our best role model, who loves us unconditionally by dying for us and reconciling us with his heavenly Father.

Let us continue to ask our Holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, to pray for us that their beloved Son, Jesus Christ, will help us to love unconditionally also.

Again, please do not forget to vote. It is your civic responsibility to vote in an election. Thanks to those who have honored their civic responsibility. God's blessing!