

31st Sun OT
Mark 12:28b-34

Two Commandments of Jesus

Jesus' ministry from the beginning became a series of controversies with the various religious parties, corresponding with those in Galilee.

We read the ***one exception*** to these conflicts today. A Scribe came to him inquiring which was the first commandment of all. Our previous knowledge of Scribes from Jerusalem puts us on our guard. Jesus answered this Scribe with two texts from Scripture: we must love God with all our powers from Deuteronomy, and we must love our neighbor as ourselves from Leviticus. The Law must be *informed* by Love. The Scribe not only complimented Jesus, but like a good rabbinical student, repeated his teaching.

Give Us This Day reflection by Sr. Ruth Burrows points out that the Scribe is not far from the Kingdom of God, but not yet ***inside*** the Kingdom of God either! And the ***key*** she writes is that “the love of God is almost impossible to evaluate, but the love of neighbor is really our only guide to its existence, let alone its depths.” James' epistle admonishes us, “*How can you love a God you don't see, but not love the neighbor standing next to you?*”

Like Bartimaeus, we join Jesus on the way, but loving our neighbor must be a full-time commitment, all the time and everywhere. As Sr. Ruth ends her article, “The more earnestly we want to surrender to God, the more determinedly we must work to love our neighbor.”

Mark's gospel has given us several great ***biblical archetypes*** these past few Sundays, especially with today's story of the Scribe. Here was a man who spent his life literally copying the sacred scriptures of Israel, equivalent to today's religious publishing house. The only difference is that the Scribe took his vocation seriously and was required to pray and fast before he started to copy. With any serious mistake, the manuscript had to be destroyed, and start over, which could take months to finish one book of the bible.

We have to assume that the Scribe's question to Jesus came after his own years of copying and studying these Sacred Scriptures. "What is the first of all the commandments?" And Jesus answers, "Love."

We already met another important *biblical archetype*, the rich man a few weeks previously with his question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life," and Jesus answers him about keeping the second part of the Ten Commandments. But I pointed out to you that Jesus left out **the first three** concerning our obligations to God. Today's gospel now answers that part of the rich man's question. "Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these," Jesus answers the Scribe, the rich man, and us.

And yet, what would that look like for a man to do just that? Maybe Bartimaeus could be that *biblical archetype* who fits that person and who knew Jesus was the one who healed him physically but came to realize that he could also heal his soul. And throwing off his most valuable possession, he follows Jesus on the way. We don't hear much more about the Scribe who maybe he followed him on the way in the future, along with the rich man. We do know that the Zebedee brothers followed him, but not to the cross.

John's gospel answers Mark's question, though, "Who is my mother, my sister, my brother?" by those **standing at the foot of the cross**, "Woman, behold your son." Those who love enough to follow all the way to the foot of the cross are his mother and brother and sister.

As for the rest of us, when all our possessions are replaced by a greater possession – our love for God, and when all our answers are finally replaced by a greater answer – our love of God, then we will be ready to follow the Lord all the way to the cross, the beloved disciples standing with his mother, with our cross.

As we approach the end of the Church Year, our reflection will be about the End Times, more importantly, our own personal End Time, death. Where will we be standing?