

One-page summary: OT XXXI [B] Sunday (Nov 4)

Homily (Mark 12:28-34)

The central theme: The central message of today's readings is the most fundamental principle of all religions, especially Christianity. God Himself tells us that we are created to love God in loving others and to love others in loving God. In other words, we are to love God living in others. Our prayers, Bible reading, Sacraments, sacrifices and all other religious practices are meant to help us grow in this relationship of love which He initiates with us and we, by His grace, accept.

Scripture lessons: The first reading presents Moses explaining the Law to the Israelites after his return from Mount Sinai. He tries to make the people reverence and obey the Law as something that will bring them dignity and purpose, stature and distinction and a unique place in history. He reminds us to love God by keeping His commandments. He also describes the blessings reserved for those who obey the commandments. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 18) reminds us that God alone in our strength and our stronghold and that He lives! The second reading tells us how Jesus, the eternal and holy high priest, offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross to demonstrate God's love for us. Paul affirms that Jesus, the new High Priest, is superior to the old High Priests for three reasons: a) He doesn't die and so doesn't need to be replaced generation after generation. b) He is sinless, so he need not offer sacrifices for his own sins. c) The Jewish priests were appointed according to the Law, but Jesus is appointed by the word of God. In today's Gospel a Scribe asks Jesus to summarize the most important of the Mosaic Laws in one sentence. Jesus cites the first sentence of the Jewish *Shema* prayer: "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength*" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then He adds its complementary law: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Leviticus 19:18). Thus, Jesus says that true religion is loving God and loving our fellow human beings at the same time, which means the only way a person can demonstrate real love of God is by showing genuine, active love for his neighbor.

Life Messages: #1: How do we love God? We must keep God's commandments, and offer daily prayers of thanksgiving, praise and petition. We must also read and meditate on His word in the Bible and prayerfully attend Mass and other liturgical functions. If I am going to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, then I am going to have to place His will ahead of mine, and so I may have to say no to some things that I might want to do. I am also going to have to seek the Lord's will and make it paramount in my life.

#2: Loving our neighbor: This means that we have to help, support, encourage, forgive, and pray for everyone, without discrimination based on color, race, gender,

age wealth or social status. If I am going to love my neighbor as I love myself, it will cost me as well! I may have to seek forgiveness when I think I have done no wrong. I may have to sacrifice something I think I need to meet a brother's need. I may have to give up time to help someone. I may have to spend time in prayer for people, go to them, and reach out to them in the name of the Lord.

OT 31 [B] (Nov 4): Dt 6:2-6; Heb 7:23-28; Mk 12: 28b-34

Homily starter anecdotes: #1: The Shema's challenge to become "Iron Man" & "Iron Woman:" Mark Allen, a six-time "Ironman" winner and holder of the title "The World's Fittest Man," is married to a retired "Iron woman" triathlete, Julie Moss. *Ironman/Ironwoman* competitions include a grueling triathlon of swimming, bicycling, and running, designed to push the capabilities of the human body to their limits. To compete as an *Ironman/Ironwoman*, one must be in superb, all-round, peak physical condition. Mark Allen has devised a 16-week program designed to get a person into a state of "ultimate fitness." Allen also claims that if one follows this complete training regimen for as little as five hours a week, he/she can be transformed from chump into champ. Perhaps more startling is Allen's description of his training regimen as a kind of "meditation" for the entire body. The training regimen includes four components: "heart training" for endurance; "mind training" for attitude; "nutritional training" for internal (what we might call "soul") fitness; and "strength training" for muscle mass. Thus, Allen has physicalized the Shema mandate given in today's Gospel, (Mark 12:29-30), into a program for shaping and transforming a human being in his/her entirety. When, in the Shema, the Lord God commands, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength," and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," He reminds Israel and us that a big part of human existence is sheerly physical. It takes a certain amount of brute strength just to get through each and every day. To deny God's presence and love in the physical world would be to remove godliness from our existence. As Christian men and women, we have our own *Iron Person* to look to as a perfect example of "fitness." Jesus Christ completely embodied the mandates of the Shema – loving His Father, God, with all His heart, mind, soul and strength, then reflecting God's love for Him in loving all He met, His neighbors, the same way. May Jesus coach us as we train in godliness, loving God and neighbor with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

#2: SoSA practicing the two great commandments of God: SoSA was given the first **Hero of Food Recovery and Gleaning Award** by the US Department of Agriculture. The **Society of St. Andrew** (SoSA) is a grassroots, Faith-based, hunger-relief nonprofit working with all denominations to bridge the hunger gap between 96 billion pounds of food wasted every year in the United States and the nearly 40 million Americans who live in poverty. SoSA relies on support from donors,

volunteers and farmers as they glean nutritious excess produce from farmers' fields and orchards after harvest and deliver it to people in need across the United States. Gleaning is the Biblical practice of hand-gathering crops left in the fields after harvest. Each year, tens of thousands of volunteers come together across the country to glean food left in farmers' fields and orchards so that it does not go to waste but instead goes to the tables of those in need. Since it began in 1979, the Society has collected more than 200-million pounds of fresh produce - perfectly nutritious food that might have some cosmetic deformity, making it unsaleable - and delivered it to soup kitchens, food banks, Salvation Army Centers, homeless shelters, and the like. 200-million pounds that otherwise would have rotted! Ken Horne, a United Methodist minister who is a co-founder of the group accepted the award and noted, "There is enough surplus food in this country to feed every hungry person...No one should ever have to go hungry." Amen! Can you imagine that God does **not** mind if people go hungry, that God does **not** care that every day some 40,000 children around the globe die of malnutrition-related causes? Hardly. Then we who say we love God will demonstrate it in love for our hungry neighbor. All it takes is the commitment of God's people, time-wise and money-wise, and the problem will be solved. No holding back. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_of_St._Andrew)

(14 Additional anecdotes are uploaded in my website: frtonyshomilies.com)

Introduction: The central message of today's readings is the most fundamental principle of all religions, especially Christianity. We are to love God in loving others and to love others in loving God. The prayers, Sacraments, sacrifices and all other religious practices are meant to help us grow in this relationship of love.

The first reading reminds us to love God by keeping His commandments. It also describes the blessings reserved for those who obey the commandments. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 18) reminds us that God alone in our strength and our stronghold, and that He lives! The second reading tells us how Jesus, the eternal and holy High Priest, offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to demonstrate God's love for us. Today's Gospel teaches us how we should return this love by loving others.

First reading, Deuteronomy 6:2-6, explained: Today's Gospel, (Mark 12:28b-34), is the climax of a series of questions on controversial issues asked by the Scribes and the Pharisees in order to trap Jesus and to eliminate him from their midst. The last question they ask is about the Law, historically Israel's most sacred institution, the foundation of every other institution. Hence, in the first reading, Moses is presented as explaining the Law to the Israelites after his return from Mount Sinai. He tries to make the people reverence and obey the Law as something that will bring them

dignity and purpose, stature and distinction and a unique place in history. He promises them temporal rewards (“*that your days may be prolonged, that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey*”), if they remain loyal to Yahweh. They have to prove their loyalty to God by observing His commandments.

Second Reading, Hebrews 7:23-28, explained: Some Jewish converts to Christianity missed the comforting institutions they had enjoyed in Judaism. The author of Hebrews tries to explain to them how much greater are the benefits they receive as Christians. Today's passage compares the older religion and priesthood to Jesus and his sacrifice. Paul affirms that Jesus, the new High Priest, is superior to the old High Priests for three reasons: a) He doesn't die and so doesn't need to be replaced generation after generation. b) He is sinless, so he need not offer sacrifices for his own sins. c) The Jewish priests were appointed according to the Law, but Jesus is appointed by the word of God.

Gospel exegesis: The context: A scribe, who believed in both the written Law and the oral tradition, was pleased to see how Jesus defeated the Sadducees who had tried to humiliate Him with the hypothetical case of a woman who had married seven husbands. Who, they had asked Jesus, would be her husband in the world to come? To the scribes, the Mosaic Law was the greatest, fullest and most perfect revelation of God's will that could ever be given. However, in the Judaism of Jesus' day there was a double tendency: to expand the Mosaic Law into hundreds of rules and regulations and to condense the 613 precepts of the Torah into a single sentence. David condensed them into 11 statements (Ps 15), Isaiah reduced them to six (Is 33:15) and later to two (Is 56:1), Micah condensed them into three (Mi 6:8), and Habakkuk reduced them all to one: “*the righteous shall live by his Faith*” (Hb 2:4). The famous Jewish rabbis and even some of the Fathers of the Church like St. Augustine also tried to condense these precepts. So it was natural for a scribe to ask Jesus to summarize the most important of the Mosaic Laws in one sentence.

Jesus' novel contribution: Jesus gave a straightforward answer, quoting directly from the Law itself and startling them with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. He cited the first sentence of the Jewish *Shema* prayer: “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength*” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then He added its complementary law: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus' contribution combined the originally separate commandments and presented them as the essence of true religion. True religion, Jesus says, is loving God and loving our fellow human beings at the same time, which means the only way a person can demonstrate real love for God is by showing genuine, active love for neighbor. The “great commandment in the Law” is

really threefold: We are commanded (1) to love God, (2) to love our neighbor, and (3) to love ourselves. We are to love God, for it is in loving Him that we are brought to the perfection of His image in us. We are to love our neighbor and ourselves as well, because both of us bear God's image, and to honor God's image is to honor Him who made it. We are to love our neighbor and our self as a way to love God: God gives us our neighbors to love so that we may learn to love Him.

The scribe was so impressed by Jesus' grasp of the Law that he remarked: "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." The comment by the scribe that the love of God and neighbor is "*worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices,*" carries special weight because he had probably come to the Temple to make his sacrifice, the usual way for the faithful of Israel to express worship and religious commitment.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself: The command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is a very demanding one. It was very hard for the Jews of Jesus' time because only a fellow-Jew, obeying the Mosaic Law, was considered their neighbor. That is why, immediately after defining this important commandment, Jesus tells them the parable of the Good Samaritan, as reported in Luke's Gospel. He wanted to teach His listeners that everyone in need is their neighbor. Love for our neighbor is a matter of deeds, not feelings. It means sharing with others the unmerited love that God lavishes on us. This is the love for neighbor that God commands in His law. Often preachers preach on loving self and cultivating self-esteem and self-respect as prerequisites to loving neighbor. But Jesus does not advocate self-love; he simply acknowledges our natural tendency to be on the lookout to be Number One, then asks us to extend that same kind of love to others. But when we come to put the greatest commandment into practice, we find that there is a flaw – and that flaw is not in the commandment, but in us. We quickly find that we cannot love God or our neighbor as we ought to. The solution lies in the "new commandment" that Jesus will give to his disciples as he enters into his Passion: "Love one another as I have loved you." No longer is our self-love to be the measure of our love of neighbor: The standard is no longer to be subjective, but objective. When we look at the extent of Jesus' love, at the way He demonstrates His infinite charity, we see the true standard.

Be reconciled with neighbor as well as with God: We are asked to love God with *all* our heart, with *all* our soul, and with *all* the strength, vitality, and human intelligence. Since God is present in all others, any sin against another person becomes a sin against God. Hence, it is not sufficient to **be reconciled** with God by repentance. We have to obtain forgiveness from, and reconciliation with, the person

we have hurt. *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (I John 4: 20.*

"There is no other commandment greater than these." This is because all the other commandments are explanations of these two. The Ten Commandments are based on the principle of reverence for God and respect for others. Hence, the first three Commandments instruct us to reverence God, His Holy Name and His Holy Day, and the remaining Commandments ask us to respect our parents and to respect the life, honor, property, and good name of others.

Life Messages: #1: How do we love God? There are several means by which we can express our love for God and gratitude to Him for His blessings, acknowledging our total dependence on Him. We must keep God's commandments, and offer daily prayers of thanksgiving, praise, contrition, and petition. We must also read and meditate on His word in the Bible and prayerfully attend Mass and other liturgical functions. If I am going to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, then I am going to have to place His will ahead of mine. This means that I may have to say no to some things that I might want to do. It also means that I am going to have to seek the Lord's will and make it paramount in my life. Taken together, loving God means we open our hearts, give Him our will, develop our minds, direct our emotions, use our bodies and deploy our resources in ways that reveal our love for Him in active, loving service of everyone we encounter

#2: Loving our neighbor: Since every human being is the child of God and the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, we are actually giving expression to our love of God by loving our neighbor as Jesus loves him and us. This means we have to help, support, encourage, forgive, and pray for everyone without discrimination based on color, race, gender, age wealth or social status. If I am going to love my neighbor as I love myself, it will cost me as well! I may have to seek forgiveness when I think I have done no wrong. I may have to sacrifice something I think I need to meet a brother's need. I may have to give up time to help someone. I may have to spend time in prayer for people, go to them, and reach out to them in the name of the Lord.

#3: Questions we should ask ourselves on a daily basis: Is my love for God all that it should be? Do I pray to Him as I should? Am I in His Word as I should be? Are there people or things that have crept in and taken over first place in my life? Is Jesus somewhere down the line after some person, some thing, or even myself? What about my love for others? Is it all it could be? How loving am I to the members of my family, to my neighbors, to the members of my parish community? The answer to all these questions will help us to measure the degree of our love of God.

JOKES OF THE WEEK #1: The child's commandments: A Sunday school teacher was talking to a class of five- and six-year-olds about the Ten Commandments. "Can you give me a Commandment with only four words?" she asked. "I know," said a little girl: "Keep off the grass." The discussion turned to family love and the teacher brought in the Commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother." Then she asked, "What about a Commandment that tells us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" A little boy who had five brothers and sisters was quick to answer: "I know," he said, "You shall not kill." When the class ended, two of the boys began to poke each other. The teacher intervened saying, "Didn't we just finish talking about the Golden Rule?" to which one of the little combatants replied, "Yes but he did it unto me first."

#2: No God, no potatoes! A few years ago, on a routine visit to a Soviet collective farm, a Russian commissar demanded of one of the laborers in the fields: "How was the crop this year?" "Oh, we had a fantastic harvest -- many, many potatoes. So many potatoes, in fact, that if you piled them up to the sky, they would reach the foot of God!" The commissar scolded, "There is no God, comrade." The laborer retorted, "There aren't any potatoes either." [Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, in *Imprimis* 20, (December 1991).]

#3: Faith in the one and only God and trust in several stars: Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby reports of Canadians, "Eighty-eight percent know their astrological signs, with half of the entire population reading their horoscopes at least once a month, outnumbering Bible readers by two to one." [Reported in Martin E. Marty, *Context*(1 November 1993).] Wouldn't it be great if 88% of the people were starting their day with the Word of God, not the alignment of the stars?

#4: Love your neighbor as you love yourself: Three men were sailing together in the Pacific Ocean. Their vessel was wrecked and they found themselves on an island. They had plenty of food, but their existence was in every way different from what their lives had been in the past. The men were walking by the seashore one day after they had been there for some months and found an ancient lantern. One man picked it up. As he began to rub it and clean it, a genie popped out and said, "Well, since you have been good enough to release me, I will give each of you one wish." The first man said, "Oh, that's perfectly marvelous. I'm a cattleman from Wyoming and I wish I were back on my ranch." Poof! He was back on his ranch. The second man said, "Well, I'm a stockbroker from New York, and I wish that I were back in Manhattan." Poof! He was back in Manhattan with his papers, his telephones, his clients and his computers. The third fellow was somewhat more relaxed about life and actually had rather enjoyed life there on the island. He said, "Well, I am quite happy here. I just

wish my two friends were back." Poof! Poof! (Everybody's idea of a "great time" isn't the same).

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