

Read

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Psalm 18:2-3a,
3b-4, 47, 51

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28b-34

LIVING THE WORD

Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 31, 2021



REFLECTION

My high school handbook featured plenty of rules—but it quickly became clear not all rules were created equal. For instance, our dress code policy mandated collared shirts, knee-length skirts, and dress pants. But if I had a dollar for every time a student got away with wearing yoga pants or a collar-less blouse, I'd be a wealthy woman! On the flipside, the handbook also said to treat everyone with respect—and any action to the contrary quickly resulted in a detention. It wasn't that the dress code didn't matter at all, but respect for persons mattered more. This rule grounded the school, so it received more attention.

Similarly, the commandments that guide our faith life vary in weight. In terms of Church teachings, a comment Pope Francis makes on an airplane is significant, but a decree put forth at a Church council holds even more sway. Then we have today's Gospel. Jesus says clearly, no commandment is greater than these: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, . . . soul, . . . mind, and . . . strength," and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love. Everything else stems from this call.



ACTION

In many cases, love takes work. It may be easy to love your best friend or favorite coach. But what about the brother that drives you crazy? Or the classmate who won't stop talking? Our hearts don't always bend towards people who annoy or frustrate us. But Jesus does not make love conditional. He calls us to love all our neighbors as we love our very selves. Take stock of your "love life" with the questions below.



"How Great Is Your Love"
— Passion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3-1i5ejG2k>



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Who do you love most in your life? Why do you love this person so much?
- ❖ Who is someone who you could do a better job of loving? How will you expand your heart to love this person more?



October 31, 2021

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #152B

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Psalm 18:2-3a, 3b-4, 47, 51

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28b-34

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Today's Gospel includes the Shema, which is an important prayer in the Jewish tradition. The Hebrew word *shema* used in this prayer means more than simply "listen" or "hear;" it is an active, deep listening that includes an active response. Jesus sets out in order the commandments that we are to live by in response to a question from a Jewish scribe. Love of God is first and foremost. Then comes love of neighbor, flowing from our love of God. Through these two important Jesus reveals his deep Jewish faith as well as God's priorities in living God's law. Living these laws brings about the Kingdom of God.

Q FOCUS: *Loving our neighbor means listening deeply and responding with the love of God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This week we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints (November 1) and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (also known as All Souls' Day, November 2). These celebrations offer a unique opportunity to consider the communion of saints, both formal and informal, and to remember loved ones who have passed away. It is a reminder that our life does not end with death, but that all who have died are awaiting the end of time when Christ will come again and bring us into the kingdom of God.

We pray for those who have died and ask for the intercession of the saints in heaven (just as you would ask for the prayers of friends or family).

Church Teaching Connection

In his papal encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis highlights the connection between our treatment of creation and our love of our neighbors. He grounds this teaching in the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis. These accounts "suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin" (*Laudato si'*, 66). Our love of God inspires us to act with love toward our neighbor and toward creation.

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 12:28b-34

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

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.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

In today's Gospel, Jesus quotes the Book of Deuteronomy when stating the first and primary commandment that the Jewish people were called to follow—"Hear, O Israel!" (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The first phrase Jesus quotes, ending with "and with your whole strength," are verses that recited daily by our Jewish brothers and sisters. This prayer is called the *Shema*, from the Hebrew word meaning "listen" or "hear." The text of the *Shema* has been expanded to include additional verses from sacred Scripture and is a part of the Jewish prayer tradition. The word *shema* means more than simply allowing another's words into your ears. Hearing is not a passive thing. Rather, to really hear is to accept this message into your heart and to respond through action. The Hebrew word is used throughout the Old Testament, and now we encounter it in the words of Jesus.

► Think of a time when you felt that another person or God really heard you. How did you

know that they were listening deeply? How did this make you feel?

► Think of a time when you really listened to someone, deeper than simply hearing their words. How did you show them that you listened?

This *Shema* prayer asks us to deeply love, believe, and respond to God as our one true God. Think of this statement alongside the first of the Ten Commandments; the command to not give honor to false gods, or, in other words, to avoid idolatry. Idols can take the form of a foreign god, like the golden calf made by the Israelites in the Book of Exodus, but they can also take the form of things like money, materialism, or technology. Idols can be people or things that we worship as though they are gods when we give our time, attention, and honor to these above all else.

► What some idols that are present in the lives of young people?

► What are some ways you might counter these idols and put God first instead?

So the first commandment is an imperative to listen and respond by putting God first. The second commandment is one we are familiar with because we hear Jesus talking about it and living it throughout the texts of the Gospel. Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Though these may seem to be two separate commands, there's a reason that Jesus answers the scribe's questions with both: they are really two parts of a whole. To love God is to love one's neighbor, and to love one's neighbor is to show love for God. This is the foundation of Christian discipleship. The command to listen unites both parts. We must listen to the deepest needs of our neighbors in order to love them as ourselves. Acting out of this deep listening shows that we have truly heard and responded.

► What does it mean to love others as yourself? Do you find this easy or challenging to do in daily life?

► What would it look like if you encouraged others to act in this same manner?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 54.

Idols come in many forms and can lead us away from placing God at the center of our lives.

Loving your neighbor cannot be separated from loving God.

Christians must listen deeply to the cry of the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized.

Act on the Word

Deep Listening

Begin this activity by having the young people discuss ways to listen well and listen deeply. How do they know that they are being listened to, and how do they show another that they deeply care and are listening? Remember, listening is about both hearing and responding.

With these elements in mind, organize the teens into pairs. They will practice the kind of deep listening we reflected on when talking about the Shema. The pairs can share stories of any topic, but here are some suggested prompts:

- ✧ What would you consider the best day of your life, and why?
- ✧ Who do you go to when you have difficult things to talk about, and why?

- ✧ Share an experience of God or the Divine. How did you know it was God?

Once each person in the pairs have had enough time to share their stories, come back together as a large group. Finish the activity by discussing some insights into deep listening that the young people may have gained from this exercise. Reflect on how they apply these skills outside this group. Also consider how listening to God influences their relationship with creation.

Closing Prayer

O God,
your incomprehensible love brought us to life
and sustains us.

May we never take this love for granted,
but respond appropriately
with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,

one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.