

Sunday October 31st, 2021
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Parishioner Reflection

By: Jim McDonald

In the first reading today, Moses gives the Israelites the first commandment that God gave him to teach the people as part of His covenant with them at Horeb. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.” (Deut. 6: 4-6)

God’s covenant with the people of Israel is a covenant of love, that Israel may prosper in His love and providence, guided in faithfulness to his commandments. “Oh that they had such a heart as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and their descendants forever!” (Deut. 5:29) This is God’s desire for us! His commandments are not a means to oppress and control us but are to set us free to love God and one another.

The world today would have us believe that true freedom is to follow our own desires and not be forced to follow the commands of an “oppressive” God who only seeks to control and restrict us. This is based on a distorted understanding of who God is. God is Love. He has no need for us; He is not lacking anything that we could give Him. God has created all things and has given us life out of pure love and has given us the power to share in His creation and to share His love. Sadly, our fallen nature tends to lead us

away from God's will for us. Instead, we seek selfish desires and our own direction in life as though we have no need for God.

As we see time and again in the scriptures, the Israelites succeed in keeping God's commandments for a time and then slowly slip back into their old sinful ways. The Israelites were unable to follow the law of the Old Covenant as given to them by God through Moses. The readings this past week from Paul's letter to the Romans contrasts this living "according to the flesh" with "living in the Spirit" that comes to us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Baptism and faith and trust in Jesus Christ give us the power to live in the spirit and therefore follow God's commandments. This is to be our joy!

And God does not leave us to find our way alone. Jesus is with us always, and in the most wonderful way in the Holy Eucharist. He is our Eternal High Priest and, as we see in the second reading, is always ready to intercede for us and to show us mercy whenever we approach him. He is our food for the journey, for our "life in the spirit".

In the Gospel reading today, when asked by one of the scribes what is the first commandment, Jesus' answer is the same as was given to Moses in the first reading as the greatest commandment, but he adds two things: we must love the Lord our God with all our mind, and the second commandment is that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. (Mark 12: 29-31)

God's desire is that we live in community, with love for Him as its foundation. This community is comprised not just of our fellow believers, but with our neighbours, for whom we are to be a sign of the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, drawing them to desire a relationship with His Son.

The commandment to "love the Lord our God with all our mind", it seems to me, is a call to direct all of our thoughts and intellect toward loving God and serving our community. This is a challenge. We are all gifted by God in different ways and therefore each of us can contribute to supporting the community in different ways and at different times in our lives.

This commandment is not meant to be a measuring stick by which our contributions are measured. It is important that the focus of our lives is in love of God and love of neighbour. Jesus knows our hearts better than we do and will give us the grace that we need, and our community needs, for the building up of His Church. The one thing that we can all do, no matter at what stage in life we find ourselves, is to pray for one another, giving praise and thanks to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

The Father's desire for us is to live in a loving, joyful community at whose heart is love for Him and fidelity to His commandments. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, as the atoning sacrifice for our sins to make this possible.

How great is His love for us!