

## **Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time:**

### **The Law of God, the Jewish Law, how did they get there?**

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus pays a wonderful compliment to a scribe. He says to him, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God'. The answer Jesus gave to the scribe's question, 'What is the first of all the commandments?' is one that the scribe fully agreed with.

The scribe's question was a very valid one. It was believed that there were more than 600 commandments or regulations in the Jewish Law at the time of Jesus. **The scribe wanted to know which of them was the most important.**

**In answering the scribe's question, Jesus gave more than was asked. He named not just the first of the commandments, but the second as well. Both were a commandment to love. Jesus was saying to the scribe that what has to be at the heart of the Jewish religion is love. The call to love was also at the heart of the new movement within Judaism that Jesus started.** Within this call to love, Jesus gives priority to the commandment to love God **and this will come again at the conclusion of His Ministry, at the Last Supper, love you one another as I have love you.**

This commandment is in our first reading this Sunday from the Book of Deuteronomy. **In this first commandment, we are being asked to give God first place in our lives.** Such love involves acknowledging **our dependence on God**, recognizing how much we receive from God and then offering all that back to God in love. This is like to pray, **'Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, all my will – all that I have and possess. You, Lord, have given all to me. I now give it back to you'**.

**The second commandment, which is as important as the first, is the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.** This commandment too is to be found in the Jewish Scriptures, **in the Book of Leviticus.** He was saying that these are the two pillars, on which everything else in the Jewish religion, stands. **(Deuteronomy is about the Law of God, Leviticus is about how to Worship God).** **In bringing together these two commandments, Jesus declares that the love of God with all our being always finds expression in loving the neighbor as if they were an extension of ourselves.** For Jesus, these two commandments are inseparable. It is not possible to love God and disregard our neighbor. Who is our neighbor? **Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus understands the 'neighbor' in the broadest possible sense, as every other human being, including those who are very different from us and who traditionally may even have been considered as our enemies.**

Jesus lived those two commandments to the full. According to today's second reading, Jesus offered Himself. **He gave Himself in love to God and to all humanity by his life and, above all, by His death.** As risen Lord, he not only prays for us, but he also gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us to live the two great commandments of love to the full. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God's love that has been poured into our hearts. **When we open ourselves up to God's unconditional love for us, will be empowered to love God in return and to love others in the way God loves them.**