

# THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 4, 2018 B

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Loving and providing God, we give you thanks for harvest blessings. You give us food to nourish our bodies and give us your Word to nourish our souls. Open our minds and hearts so we can hear your Word for us today. Teach us how to walk the path of love.*

**Response to last week's Word:** *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

**Facilitator:** The Great Commandment of love is the focus of the first reading and the Gospel. In this **ninth lesson** on the nature of true discipleship, Jesus tells us that the true disciple is one who lives the Great Commandment of love. The second reading speaks of the new covenant sacrifice and its single priesthood.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.*

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

## FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

This first reading is to the faithful Jew, what the Creed is to Catholics. It is a summary statement of Israel's beliefs called the "Shema Israel" ("Hear, O Israel"). "*Hear, O Israel, that the Lord your God is one.*" There is only *one* God. The *Shema* also proclaims Israel's call to love God with all her heart, soul and mind—with her whole being. This is in *response* to a God who loves Israel unconditionally and who is present and active in her history and life. If the people are faithful to God, they will experience a long and good life.

## RESPONSORIAL PSALM 18

This is a royal psalm of thanksgiving, a suitable response to a God who loves us totally.

## SECOND READING: Hebrews 7:23-38

This reading highlights the singular character of the priesthood of Jesus and the sacrifice he offered. The author compares Jesus' priesthood to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant. The author insists that Jesus' priesthood is superior in every way. For example, Jesus' priesthood is eternal, whereas the Levitical priesthood is temporal. The latter had to offer sacrifice for their own sins, whereas Jesus' priesthood is sinless and undefiled. Furthermore, Jesus' priestly status was sealed with a divine oath.

## PROCLAMATION GOSPEL: Mark 12:28-34

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.*

**A participant reads the Gospel again,  
then all pause to reflect.**

## GOSPEL COMMENTARY: Mark 12:28-34

*Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.*

Jesus is asked which of the commandments is the greatest. His response links two Old Testament texts: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Both texts joined together are a summary of the whole law. Our response to a God who loves us unconditionally must be total. Linking love of God to love of neighbor is distinctively Christian. In his first letter, John says to us: "*If anyone says 'I love God' but hates his brother, he is a liar ... This is the commandment we have from him: 'Whoever loves God must also love his brother' "*" (4:20-21).

## FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

**Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.**

2. “Love is a many splendored thing,” as the song goes. What criteria would you use to judge:

- a person’s love for God?
- a person’s love for others?

3. What does “to love God with one’s whole being” mean to you? Name one thing that hinders you from loving God with your whole mind and heart?

4. What is true love of self? How is it different from selfish love of self?

5. What is the one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday’s Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

**JOURNALING:** *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

**RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday’s Gospel. Suggestion: You can begin to pray for someone you find very hard to love.

**SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD**

Share a prayer, however brief, on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to love you more—OR—Lord, help me to appreciate that in loving my neighbor, I am loving you more.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

*Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).*

Pray especially for those who daily have to try to love persons who are very difficult to love. Consider ending by praying together the following two prayers on love.

**GOD AS MY FIRST LOVE**

Lord God,  
I know that if I do not love you  
with all my heart, with all my mind,  
with all my soul and with all my strength,  
I shall love something else  
with all my heart and mind  
and soul and strength.  
Grant that, putting you first in all my loving,  
I may be liberated from all lesser loves and loyalties,  
and have you as my first love,  
my chief good and my final joy. Amen.  
(Adapted from George Appleton)

**I LOVE YOU, O MY GOD**

I love you, O my God,  
and my only desire is to love you  
until the last breath of my life.  
I love you, O my infinitely lovable God,  
and I would rather die loving you,  
than live without loving you.  
I love you, Lord,  
and the only grace I ask  
is to love you eternally.  
My God, if my tongue cannot say  
in every moment that I love you,  
I want my heart to repeat it to you  
as often as I draw breath. Amen.  
(St. John Vianney)

For more beautiful prayers, visit Ascension’s website [www.ascensioncatholic.net](http://www.ascensioncatholic.net) and click on *Treasury of Prayers*.

**CONCLUDE WITH A SONG ©**