

Thirty-first Sunday of the Year B

Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' 29 Jesus replied. 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. 31 The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' 32 The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. 33 To love him with all your heart, and with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' 34 Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him any more.

Other readings: Deuteronomy 6:2-6 Psalm 17 (18) Hebrews 7:23-28

Jesus is now in Jerusalem and the evangelist Mark gives us an account of his activities there. He has several encounters with the religious teachers. In this particular meeting there is no animosity. It is a peaceful dialogue between those who seek to do God's will.

The passage shows how Jesus' teaching takes the Hebrew Scriptures as its starting point. The words of Scripture Jesus speaks here are the same words we have already heard in the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, which includes in its final verses the Jewish prayer known commonly as the *Shema* ('listen, Israel).

To these words taken from Deuteronomy Jesus adds a quotation from Leviticus, another book of the Law, which commands love of neighbour.

The conversation with the scribe continues by raising a point very frequently made by the prophets of the Old Testament and by Jesus: love of God and of neighbour is of more importance than 'holocaust and sacrifice'.

There is a profound agreement between Jesus and the teachers of Judaism. The tragedy which follows comes when worldly calculations are seen to be more important than seeking together to do the will of God. It is a situation repeated with dreadful regularity throughout the history of the world.

Do I seek to follow the great commandments given by God and restated by Jesus?

Do I cherish the Jewish foundations of my faith and seek to understand them?

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God.

Let us pray for all involved in peaceful dialogue between faiths.