

31<sup>st</sup> Ordinary Sunday  
November 4, 2018  
“The Loyalty of Love”

Dt 6:2-6

Heb 7:23-28

Mk 12:28-34

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

One of the decisions that everyone has to make at some time is where our truest loyalty lies. Most of us have to make this decision about lesser loyalties from time to time as new interests gain our attention. Life is such that, often, we find ourselves in conflicting loyalties or with conflicting commitments. There are even laws against this sort of thing in business and in politics. It's called “a conflict of interest” – and the guilty often see the loss of their reputation or their career!

Today, Moses tells the Chosen People that there can be no conflict of interest regarding God! They must serve the Lord God alone. There can be no other god in their lives or hearts!

Historically, the Hebrews lived in a land surrounded by pagan cultures with their pagan gods. Moreover, the pagans always invented gods to serve their needs. These needs could usually be reduced to some aspect of wealth, power, and sex. However, these gods could never deliver what they, presumably, could do for the individual or the group because they never really existed. Nevertheless, worship of these gods was an on-going problem for the Hebrew nation, because forbidden intermarriage often took place between the pagans and themselves.

The Chosen People were to “fear” the Lord God. However, the best understanding of this was not a servile fear of punishment or destruction – although these were always possibilities. Instead, it was to be a holy awe – a profound reverence – an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and gratitude for the One who, alone, could be all things for them!

Thus, they were to honor, reverence, and serve the Lord God of the universe with love! Furthermore, this love was to be with their entire being: all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength! Worshiping God this way would be demonstrated by fidelity to the Commandments and statutes that God had given to them through Moses!

In the Gospel selection, one of the scribes, who, obviously, respected Jesus, came with a question. It was one that almost every teacher or rabbi had to consider. Which of all the 10 Commandments and the 613 precepts of the Torah was first and most important?

The scribe's goodwill prompted one of the greatest teachings of Jesus. "The Lord our God is Lord alone" – He is the only God of the universe – He is the only one worthy of absolute commitment and undivided loyalty. Moreover, we must love the Lord God with our total being – with every aspect of our person – physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually! No one and no thing can ever be set before Him!

And then Jesus did an extraordinary thing. He said that there was a second commandment that had to stand before all the others as well. We were to: "Love our neighbor as ourself"! We were to treat all others no less than we wished to be treated ourselves in all things!

Brothers and Sisters, the reason we make life so hard for ourselves is that we are continually struggling with the attractions of lesser gods. We want God to serve us. Thus, wealth, power, and eros always tempt us to use them for ourselves and not in the way that God intended. We see God as something for which we are willing to expend only so much personal capital in exchange for what we will get in return. God becomes a commodity that is worth only so much of our commitment, loyalty, and so-called "love"!

But all pseudo gods never serve us in the way we hope. They can never, ever, fill the deepest longings of the human heart and spirit. They can never refresh us, energize us, or empower us like the grace of God itself. And, ultimately, they can never welcome us into that eternal life that God has promised for all those who truly serve Him with undivided loyalty and love!

The challenge we all face is, gradually, to transform all the lesser, very legitimate loves we have into the overwhelming and all-encompassing love that God has for us! In other words, we allow God's love for us to become our love for Him!

So, let us pray, that with God's grace, all that God wants for us and from us will become a reality!

Amen.

November 4, 2018

Msgr. Russell G. Terra