

Thirty First Sunday Ordinary Time – B – 2018
Deuteronomy 6.2-6///Hebrews 7.23-28///Mark 12.28b-34

→with great thanks [and I might add relief]...the political election will come to a close this coming Tuesday...

→soon...the signs will be gone...the ads will stop...and the notices in our mailboxes and phones and tablets will go away.

→it has been an intense political season...and here in Ohio we will have a new governor as well as a multitude of other national, state and local leaders come Wednesday.

→and one of the characteristics of any election is that usually the choice that has to be made is between two distinctively different candidates...

→it is always about the final two...and it's not just this way with politics...

→in almost any sort of competition we engage in...it always seems to come down to the final two...from the March Madness in college basketball to the College Football Championship to the Super Bowl and World Series to Dancing with the Stars....

→it is always about the final two...

→have you ever thought why that is?

→well....I believe it is because we need a smaller number to choose from in order to capture our imagination, focus our perspective and inspire our passions.

→and that is what happens today in both our first reading and our gospel passage... the commandments of the Lord...also come down to just two

→it is interesting to note that in the days of Moses, as mentioned in our Old Testament reading today, God gave the people of Israel many commandments and statutes to help them know and follow in His ways.

→these commandments and laws were given to serve as blueprint, a set of instructions, a moral GPS [if you will] to guide and guard God's people through the world and mark them as His special people.

→in the first 5 books of Moses, [the first 5 books of the OT] we find 613 unique and distinct commandments given by God through Moses to the people.

→to say the least...it clearly became a cumbersome instruction book ...let alone a way of life...and so God, knowing our preference for conciseness and a simplicity...reduced the 613 rules to just 10 commandments

→he writes his "top 10" on two stone tablets and gives them to Moses to give to the people...

→but then as we hear in the Gospel...even the top 10 were too much....[how many of us even today struggle to name all 10 commandments when asked]....and so today Jesus...summarizes the top 10 into just two....

"the Lord our God is Lord alone...love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength....and love your neighbor as yourself"

→the 613 become 10...and the 10 become 2

→and when the scribe realizes what Jesus has done...and is enlightened to the what the teaching of God is all about....Jesus responds by saying... "you are not far from the kingdom of God."

→which becomes **our** challenge and lesson for today.

→...."how far or how close **are we**...to the kingdom of God!" in the lives we are living here and now...

→as we well know the blueprint for us to get to eternal life is summed up in these two commandments given today

→first is to acknowledge the presence and **primacy** of God in our lives....that as our creator, God formed us out of the dust from the earth for no other reason than [that] he loved us and continues to love us....and it is that love that God asks in return from us.

→loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind...loving God as our Lord alone is what puts us on the path towards eternal life

→yet.....how many of us can honestly say **we ARE** on that path these days...especially when at times our love for other things –possessions and desires, wants and control, entitlement and power – sometimes outweigh our love for God?

→and secondly our challenge is to recognize and respond to the Lord's call to love each other as we love ourselves.

→and yet, how often does our sense of self-importance and self-worth...our individuality and selfishness...prevent us from doing just that

PAUSE

→the lesson for us today is understand the impact of God's love in our hearts

→to realize what we truly need to be about as we continue our life here on this earth....and to determine....

→just how far, or how close we might be to the kingdom of God...

→today we are being challenged to realize and understand, to accept and acknowledge.... that the kingdom of God could be as near as a neighbor's need for comfort

→as near as our next forgiving word or action

→as near as our next act of kindness, patience and compassion.

PAUSE

→you see...in the end it really does come down to just two...

---two candidates...two teams...two dancers....two commandments

→...one pointed vertically to God and towards the heavens...

“love the Lord your God alone with all your heart and soul and strength and mind”

→and the other pointed horizontally towards each other....

“love your neighbor as your self.”

→and where they meet they form a cross

→and that is why we make the sign of the cross every time we pray

→that is why the crucifix is displayed so prominently here in our place of worship and hopefully in our homes as well.

→to remind us that we are people marked...and redeemed...**by the love we have for**

God and the love we have for one another.