

Homily – 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2020

We hear in today's Gospel Jesus' famous teaching on the two greatest commandments: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with your mind.*" "And a second is like it: "*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

Last year when I was on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we visited the Western Wall, which is located in the Jewish Quarter of the older part of Jerusalem.

The Western Wall is what remains of the expansion of the Second Temple of Solomon, which was built by King Herod in the year 19 BC, and it was destroyed by the Roman Army in the year 70 AD.

Now, to pray at the wall, one has to cover one's head as a sign of humility before God. Orthodox and Observant Jews wear a skullcap called a *kippah*; it's also what the Pope and the bishops wear to symbolize Christ's Jewish heritage; but in the Roman Church it's called a *Zucchetto* (which is the Italian word for pumpkin, because it looks like half a pumpkin.)

In addition to the *kippah*, Jewish men wear a *phylactery* when they pray. Now a *phylactery* is a set of small black leather boxes placed on the forehead and wrapped around the left arm. The word *phylactery* comes from a Greek word meaning to "safeguard or protect." In Hebrew, it's called a *Tefillin*. Inside the *Tefillin* contain tiny scrolls of parchment with verses from the *Torah*, which are the first five books of the Old Testament. And one of the most common pieces of parchment housed in the *Tefillin* is Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4, which is called the *Shema* prayer: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind,*" which is exactly what Jesus tells the lawyer in today's Gospel. And so, for the Jews, the

Shema prayer is so important and essential to their faith that it's placed on the forehead and also on the doorposts of Jewish households as a REMINDER that worship belongs to God alone.

If you're interested in seeing Orthodox Jewish customs and traditions, there are many videos on YouTube, and if you have Netflix, I recommend that you watch the show **Shtisel**; which is about an Orthodox Jewish family living in Jerusalem; and there's another show called **Unorthodox**; which is about a young woman leaving her strict Orthodox Jewish community. Now both are good shows, but both are fictional, and there are inaccuracies to make room for artistic license, similar to how Catholics are inaccurately depicted in movies such as **The Two Popes**.

And so, the Shema prayer should be as important and essential for us Christians as it is to our Jewish brothers and sisters! It's because this prayer proclaims that there is only one true God, and that He is the God of all creation. This is the God who is **omnipotent, loving, powerful and faithful**. This same God made a covenant with the people of Israel out of His love for them. And history has shown God to be faithful, even when Israel wasn't. And so for all of these reasons, God is worthy of their obedience and love. God is Lord of all, and it is only fitting that we pay Him homage.

Again, as Jesus makes it clear in today's Gospel, we are reminded that God is to be given the highest priority over everything else. But He does something more; **He Glorifies God in Himself!** He says in John 13:31: *Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him.* And we are reminded of this every time we go to mass when we say (or used to sing) *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to people of Good will.*

When we glorify God first and foremost, the world will be properly ordered. When we glorify God, we will achieve peace; peace to people of good will. And that's why whenever we ignore God, or we believe that we can achieve peace without Him, chaos will ensue. And it's happened before in the past and it's happening even now!

Jesus' entire existence and sole purpose of coming down to earth is to reveal His Father to all the nations. He said, "*Father, I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do...I have made your name known.*" (John 17:4) And that's why He's known as the Prince of Peace. He reconciles us to His Father by glorifying Him, and allows us to partake in that glory!

And so the best way we can glorify God besides loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, is to follow the second Commandment: "*To love your neighbor as yourself!*"

Now, we cannot love our neighbor as we love ourselves unless we love God first. We learned this from our ancient Jewish ancestors. And if we don't live for the glory of God, we live for our own glory, because *to glorify God is to fully become the person God intends you to be; and that is to become a person of great holiness, charity, and wisdom.*^[1]

There's an old saying, "*You cannot love what you do not know.*" In order to love God more, we have to **know** Him, and again, in order to do that, we need to give Him the glory that He deserves.

And so, as Christians, as members of the New Covenant, let us glorify God every day by obeying these two Commandments. Let us remind ourselves every day of loving and glorifying God before all else.

Lastly, St. Theresa of Avila said, "*The more **advanced** you see you are in love with God, the more advanced you will be in the love of your neighbor. And to repay us for our love for our neighbor, God will in a thousand ways increase the love we have for Him.*"