

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday, we met Jesus healing a blind man on the roadside. Bartimaeus, the blind man had a new vision.... he saw...he believed, and he followed Jesus. We were challenged, just as the disciples were, to trust in the Lord's power to heal and to open our eyes that we may see ourselves and the directions of our life more clearly. We were challenged to join the blind man and the disciples to walk with the Jesus onward to Jerusalem, his destination.

We have skipped almost two chapters in our Journey with Jesus through the Gospel of Mark. Last week, we read from Chapter 10 and today, we read from chapter 12. I want to encourage you to read what we skipped and get good insights into what we missed on the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. We missed reading about the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, parable of the tenant farmers, teaching on the resurrection and other important teachings of Jesus. In today's Gospel reading (Mark 12:28-34), we meet Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem – they have already arrived! Jesus is now in the temple area and a number of controversies rose in conversation with the leading Jews. Mark mentions the chief priests, scribes, elders, pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees.

One of the Scribes asked Jesus about which of the commandments was the first. This scribe, however, was not antagonistic like the others. He wanted to know. The question about which of the 613 precepts is the greatest was a common one put to all teachers. Drawing on the Scripture familiar to Jews, Jesus presented the first as loving God above all else with heart, mind, soul, and strength - loving God with all you are and all you have - and the second as loving "neighbor as yourself".

The greatest commandment concerns the "uniqueness" of God – God and God alone in the first place - and the command to love God with our whole being as we read in the first reading of today's mass (Deuteronomy 6:2-6). This passage is actually a prayer that the Jew prays three times a day and a brief statement of the Jewish creed. This also reflects the national pride that Israel derived from having the Law that God gave them. Israel needed this reminder during a time of national crisis. Moses was giving this band of runaway slaves something that will bring them dignity and purpose, and stature, and distinction among the nations of the world, a unique place in history. This was the beginning of nationhood for a new people, their transformation from slaves to citizens. This gave them hope, and pride as well. The source of all this was, "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" – God first – the unique place of God in their history!

Jesus went a step further and added, "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). What connects our relationship to God, neighbor and our self is "Love". The purpose of the law was to sustain relationships and "love" is the connecting word in that ancient law. The kind of greatness to which God is calling his people is that they are to be distinguished among the nations by their love of God and of neighbor. They are to prefer those loves to "all burnt offerings and sacrifices." Like Jesus, their behavior should be so good, their speech so evidently truthful, that no one can question them.

The Scribe welcomed this insight and added that it was even worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice. Right in the temple area, the scribe affirms what is really important, not just the validity of keeping the law and not even the religious obligations of temple sacrifice so dear to Jews, but "LOVE"! Jesus affirmed the Scribe's insight and told him that he was "not far from the kingdom". Jesus would teach, eventually, that we can be and belong in the kingdom and not just "not be far from the kingdom". To really belong in the kingdom, we must learn to love as he has loved us: "love one another as I have loved you". This is our challenge. We are called to love others as Jesus loves us with selfless, unconditional, unconquerable, invincible, unwearied, benevolent, steadfast love!

In Jesus, the standard of love changed from limiting vengeance to sacrificial love – from an eye for eye to love others as you love yourself to love others as God loves us. This is our challenge, "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 15:12). Saint Augustine tells us, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." By loving God and walking in His ways, we do not use others to meet our needs or exploit them for our purposes. By centering on God's love, we are liberated to love everything as God's gifts. We come to experience ourselves as loved and gifted. We no longer need to prove our worth. We are loved by "LOVE." We are accepted by Total, Unconditional Acceptance. Love of God does not turn us away from the world - love opens our eyes to see the world as God's gift to us.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). St. Paul advised the Ephesians, "be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2). God loves us because God is love - it is his nature to love. He is faithful to his nature even when we are unfaithful to our nature, even when we do not respond to His love. God's love is pure, benevolent, and steadfast. Our love is imperfect and often selfish. We must strive to love as God loves us and let our love become gracious, unselfish, and sacrificial.

I encourage you to take a few minutes each day of this week to go to a quiet place, be still and reflect on how your day has been, and to reflect on the quality of your love for God, for yourself and for others. Reflect also on the possibility of raising the quality of your love for others and let it become gracious and sacrificial as you go about doing your daily chores.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 3, 2024

**We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures,
but we are the sum of the Father's love for us
and our real capacity to become the image of His Son.**
(Pope John Paul II)

Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
by whose gift your faithful offer you
right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray,
that we may hasten without stumbling
to receive the things you have promised.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**Forbearance is one of the most compassionate and kind things
that we can do for others and for ourselves too in that process.**

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Moses summed up the law: "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.....so love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength". He called his people to remember what God had done for them as he brought them out of slavery into a land of freedom. God was pleased to give them a law to keep them safe and to enable them to prosper.

It was believed to be a wonderful thing, and it still is, to discover that "God's Word stands for ever", "firm as the heavens" - that God's Truth endures. It is great to know "God's faithfulness", the utter reliability, loyalty, dependability of "God's faithfulness". You simply can depend on

"God Being There". Even when God's people had strayed and returned God was just as faithful as God has ever been before. By "God's word", God's law, all things, the whole universe "stands" - the whole universe obeys "God's law".

The universe obeys God's rules and man lives in an orderly universe. Man is meant to live an orderly life, a life of obedience to God's rules. God's rules are not dead rules; they are alive, they came out of the mouths of the "living God". Our God was pleased to give us a law to keep us safe and to help us prosper according to his will and purpose.

So, let God's law hold you together and keep you safe and help you prosper.

Psalm 18

This is a royal thanksgiving Psalm for a military victory. The whole Psalm is found in 2 Samuel chapter 22. David wrote this Psalm after he had finally won all his battles. He uses words that describe how he feels about the God who gave him victory over his enemies. He sees God as his strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, Altar, stronghold and so on. He has learned to trust in God's provident care. He expresses his complete confidence, "I call and He answers".

God's act of deliverance is described in poetic language....God came riding on the cherubs and on the wings of the wind; He drew me out of many waters and brought me to a broad place.....He delivered me because, "He delighted in me". Even in the midst of natural disasters, God cares for me. God has given himself to his people in love and his love is loyal, steadfast and unconquerable. This Psalm carries much for our reflection and prayer. Read and prayerfully reflect over this Psalm. Use your imagination. Visualize if you can, "God riding on the cherubs", "riding on the wings of the wind", "leaning toward me" because "He delights in me".

**I love you, O Lord, my strength,
O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.
O God, my rock of refuge,
My shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!**

Hebrews 7:23-28

This excerpt tells us that Jesus, forever, lives to save those who approach him. Unlike other priests, Jesus had no need to offer sacrifice day after day – he offered himself once and for all. We participate in this mission of Jesus, the mission of total giving.

The greatest of all the Levitical sacrifices began with a sacrifice for the sins of the high priest. Jesus did not have to make this sacrifice because he was sinless. The Levitical High Priest was a

sinful man offering animal sacrifices for sinful people; Jesus was the sinless son of God offering himself for the sins of all people. It was the law that appointed the high priest; it was the promise of God and God's unconditional love that made Jesus the High priest.

The author of this letter tells us that Jesus alone could open the way to God because he was the perfect High Priest and he offered the one perfect sacrifice – himself. Any sacrifice requires a priest and a sacrificial offering. Jesus was both the priest and the sacrificial offering unlike all the other priests before him.

We must keep seeking God and God's ways and his moving presence in our life. As St. Augustine says, our hearts are restless until it finds rest in him. There are many things in us that block our way to God. Jesus alone is the priest who can open our way back to God.

Mark 12:28-34

One of the Scribes asked Jesus about which of the commandments was the first. Jesus presented the first as loving God above all else with heart, mind, soul and strength; loving God with all you are and all you have and the second as loving "neighbor as yourself". The Scribe welcomed this insight and added that it was even worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice. Jesus affirmed the Scribe's insight and told him that he was "not far from the kingdom". Jesus would teach, eventually, that we can be and belong in the kingdom and not just "not be far from the kingdom". To really belong in the kingdom, we must learn to love as he has loved us: "love one another as I have loved you". This is our challenge.

It is this "LOVE" - unconquerable benevolence that will make us "sons of God", godlike persons. That is WHO GOD IS: LOVE. We are to image HIM - His Love, His Benevolence - seeking the highest good of all. God makes his sun rise on the good and on the wicked; He sends his rain on the just and the unjust. We are called to love others as Jesus loves us with unconditional, unconquerable, invincible, unwearied, benevolent love. Jesus sums up the law and the prophets into "LOVE" - love with our whole being. As St. Augustine says, it is only in loving God with our whole being that we come to love our life, our self and others in the proper way.

By loving God and walking in His ways, we do not use others to meet our needs or exploit them for our purposes. By centering on God's love, we are liberated to love everything as God's gifts. We come to experience ourselves as loved and gifted. We no longer need to prove our worth. We are loved by "LOVE". We are accepted by Total, Unconditional Acceptance. Love of God does not turn us away from the world - love opens our eyes to see the world as God's gift to us. Love gives us a new, clearer and true vision of the world.

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, November 3 - St. Martin de Porres and 22 other saints are remembered this day.

Martin was born in Lima, Peru on December 9, 1579. His mother was black and his father was a wealthy Spanish noble who abandoned his wife and two children. Martin, his sister and his mother lived in poverty during the early years of their lives. At the age of 12, Martin became a barber. Barbers of those days did more than cut hair. They set broken bones, dressed wounds, prescribed healing herbs, etc. They were healers of body as well as troubled minds.

Martin won the trust of people and became a helper at the Dominican monastery. Some felt that he shouldn't be in the monastery because he was black and others encouraged him because of his knowledge and kindness. At the age of 24, he became a Dominican brother and spent his life caring for the poor, the sick, the homeless and the helpless. He had a deep reverence for birds, animals, trees and all of God's creation. He died on November 3, 1639, in Lima, Peru. Let us draw inspiration from the humble and self-sacrificing life of Martin.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**We are the sum of all that is of God and from God,
the sum of all that befits God and God's will and purpose.**

