

“The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” Words from our Gospel today from the 12th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Ever see those DirecTV commercials about settling? I bring these commercials to your attention because in many ways we are like the settlers. There are a lot of things that we settle for in life besides choosing cable over DirecTV. The reality is that not everyone can have the highest-paying jobs or the most influential seats of power. Even with all the determination in the world, very few have the capabilities to make it to Broadway, to Hollywood, or the Big Leagues for Football, or Hockey, or another sport. So we settle for more conventional careers out of necessity. Moreover, there is only so much time available to us, so we are forced to settle for only a few of our favorite activities, or we’ll become overwhelmed by all our many undertakings. When it comes to people, we settle for less than satisfying relationships because we are scared to be alone, scared to lose the stability a relationship offers, or scared of not being good enough. We also stay in our comfort zones because they’re safe: we won’t fail or get hurt. In all these ways and more, we settle.

I implore you today – do not settle for a bland and mediocre existence. Don’t settle for anything less than greatness. We were made by God to be great. And the thing is, you can be a great person in any walk and manner of life. If that means as a student you have a test coming up at school – do a great job at it; if your friend is hurting over something that happened to them – go over and be with them and be a great friend to them; if that’s by taking up a career as a plumber – then be a great plumber like Super Mario who saved Princess Peach and Mushroom Kingdom; if that’s by being a doctor – become the best doctor you can be; if that’s as a husband or wife – become a great spouse and parent to your children. When I die someday, I hope people look at me and say, he was a great priest. Whatever it is, whatever you are doing, be great at it. There are some things we have to settle for, but those people who choose to settle for anything less than greatness, will never be happy.

How is it that we can become great? What should we be doing? Is there a rule of life, a mandate that helps us achieve greatness? The question posed to Jesus today, "which commandment is the greatest?" invites us not only to pick one commandment amongst many but to think about what it is that makes such a commandment so great. This question about the greatest commandment is one traditionally asked by rabbis and teachers throughout Israel's history to help others understand and prioritize their life in faith, so that one may come to live a full and blessed life. At this point in the Gospel, the religious officials are tired of trying to trap Jesus into picking sides. He had silenced the Sadducees and had many times repudiated the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Now, when Jesus is tested today by the scholar of the law about the greatest commandment, it is actually a genuine request. Jesus, they say, where do you stand, what is the greatest commandment? What way of life and teaching and commandment do you espouse that embodies greatness? In response to this open-ended question, Jesus gives a simple and non-defensive answer. Drawing upon all of salvation history, Jesus teaches us that we are indeed to love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls. And he also teaches that we need to love our neighbor as ourselves. This second commandment becomes equal to the first. We cannot love God whom we cannot see if we do not love our brothers and sisters whom we can see in the here and now. All other commandments can be summed up in this way.

No matter how we feel or where we are or what we are doing or who we are with, we cannot settle for less. We have to give over our whole being - heart mind and soul - in love to God, to others, and to ourselves. That is the only way we can draw close to the Kingdom of God. That is the only way we can achieve the greatness we were made for. That is what makes these commandments so great... There are too many settlers in this world. Look around at their bland and mediocre existence. There are too many people who aren't giving their all over to the greatness of love. I challenge you not to settle. Instead, let us rise to the occasion and become people of *great* love.

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/110418.cfm>

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 152

Reading 1 [DT 6:2-6](#)

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

"Fear the LORD, your God,
and keep, throughout the days of your lives,
all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you,
and thus have long life.
Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them,
that you may grow and prosper the more,
in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers,
to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!
Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God,
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your strength.
Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

Responsorial Psalm [PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51](#)

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.

I love you, O LORD, my strength,
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge,
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!
Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,
and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The LORD lives! And blessed be my rock!
Extolled be God my savior.

You who gave great victories to your king
and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading 2 [HEB 7:23-28](#)

Brothers and sisters:

The levitical priests were many
because they were prevented by death from remaining in office,
but Jesus, because he remains forever,
has a priesthood that does not pass away.
Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him,
since he lives forever to make intercession for them.

It was fitting that we should have such a high priest:
holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners,
higher than the heavens.
He has no need, as did the high priests,
to offer sacrifice day after day,

first for his own sins and then for those of the people;
he did that once for all when he offered himself.
For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests,
but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law,
appoints a son,
who has been made perfect forever.

Alleluia [JN 14:23](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord;
and my father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [MK 12:28B-34](#)

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus replied, "The first is this:

Hear, O Israel!

The Lord our God is Lord alone!

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
and with all your strength.*

The second is this:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher.

You are right in saying,

'He is One and there is no other than he.'

And 'to love him with all your heart,

with all your understanding,

with all your strength,

and to love your neighbor as yourself

is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding,
he said to him,

"You are not far from the kingdom of God."

And no one dared to ask him any more questions.