

**31st Sunday in Ordinary Time: November 3, 2024.**

### **The Call to Authentic Christianity**

**Mark 12: 28-34:**

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions”.

**Wristbands are an** ancient practice that has served important purposes over hundreds of years. Today, we find a new twist to such pieces of apparel with a massive shift in their look and function. Wristbands and bracelet-like bands, similar to wristwatches, have become popular in fashion. Why do people wear them? Wearing wristbands has increased dramatically in recent times, and people are finding more and more reasons to wear them.

**Wristbands serve many purposes**, such as Identification. They can be used to identify people at events such as concerts, festivals, and water parks. They also serve as control and access management to events. They can also serve as souvenirs, wrist support, or Fashion. Above all, with wristbands, one makes some public statements about one’s faith or ideology.

In response to the scribe’s question, Jesus proposes the Jewish Shema as the foundation and heart of our relationship with God. Like in every human relationship, love for the other is the source and summit. Our culture longs to see real Christians, not perfect Christians, but real Christians, Authentic Christians. In today’s Gospel, JESUS GIVES US THE CALL TO AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY. He tells us we must love God with ALL that we are. Half-hearted love is not acceptable! God demands an all-consuming love.

Deuteronomy (6:4-6): “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts”.

**Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP Homily 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time: November 3, 2024**

Shema Yisrael is Judaism's central affirmation. Shema comes from the Hebrew for "Listen Up" from Deuteronomy 6:4: "Listen Up, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." The prayer dates from the first millennium B.C.E., when it was recited as part of regular services in the ancient temple in Jerusalem. It expresses belief in God's singularity, that is, in God's oneness and incomparability.

The Shema is recited twice daily in the morning and evening prayers. It serves as the climax of the liturgy on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. It is often the final prayers recited by a dying Jew, including Jewish martyrs who, throughout the ages, made it their final profession of faith before being put to death. The Shema summons every Jew to feel an all-consuming love for God. It's a love that is unreserved, always-demanding, in all places and all circumstances. Nothing is excluded from divine love: all our thoughts, words, and actions.

### **The Shema as a reminder and commitment to God's presence and His love:**

"Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth." (**Deuteronomy 11: 8-21**)

The *phylacteries* are small leather boxes with straps that Jews wear during prayer. They are placed on the upper arm across from the heart and on the head between the eyes. The boxes contain parchment scrolls with verses from the sacred Shema texts in Hebrew (with other biblical paragraphs). This distinguishes a Jewish home and is a visible sign and symbol of Jewish identity and commitment in such a household.

### **Conclusion:**

Friends, we are to love God, think constantly about him, teach our children how to love God, and live each day by the guidelines in his Word. Jesus says that loving God and loving others encompasses all the other Old Testament laws. To be authentic Christians, we must be motivated in all we do by a passion for God. And when we lose that passion for God, we can renew it by investing more in the relationship by doing the following;

1. Worship and serve God out of love, and not obligation.
2. Making time to know God more through Bible study and prayer.

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3. James (4:8) says that when we draw near to God, God will draw near to us.
4. Keep friends who have the same desire to love God.

**Do Good Every Day:** “I discovered that life comprises of two days: A day for you and a day against you. So when it is for you, do not be reckless, and when it is against you, be patient because both days will expire. If you can't be a bridge to connect people, then don't be a wall to separate them. If you can't be a light to brighten people's good deeds, then don't be the darkness covering their efforts. If you can't be a vaccine to give life, don't be a virus to terminate it. We can only be each other's keepers. Do good every day”. (author unknown)

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