

## *Gospel Reflection - By Greg Sunter*

Like last week's gospel, we again have an example of the Pharisees seeking to 'catch Jesus out' in his interpretation of scripture. The Pharisees were regarded as the great interpreters of the Torah—the Law. To them, ALL the commandments were vitally important, not just the Ten Commandments given to Moses with which we are perhaps most familiar, but the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) contained within the Torah—the first five books of the Bible. These 613 *mitzvot* governed all aspects of Jewish life. For the Pharisees to ask Jesus about the “greatest” commandment was a blatant challenge to him. Perhaps they expected Jesus to name one commandment and then they could challenge him with a whole series of “What about ...?” questions.

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees highlights their preoccupation with the particulars of the Law contained within scripture. In their over-emphasis on the details of religious observance, they have forgotten about the most basic element of faith: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Jesus reminds them that being faithful to God isn't about following precise rules but rather it is simply about loving God. With this one sentence, Jesus undermines the power position of the Pharisees. If the Law is as simple as “Love God,” what need is there of Pharisees to interpret the details of the Law? Having pulled the rug out from under them, Jesus follows up with his reminder that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. This is a call to compassion and justice that Jesus practiced freely but was sadly lacking in the religious authorities of his time.

### **Scriptural context—Quoting scripture**

The question and response that we see in this gospel passage was a common form of scholarly debate in the Jewish tradition. The Pharisees ask Jesus which of the commandments is the greatest. Jesus responds by directly quoting the commandment from the ancient scriptures. His reply, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” comes directly from Deuteronomy 6:4. Further, Jesus' follow up, “you must love your neighbor as yourself,” comes from Leviticus 19:18. Deuteronomy and Leviticus are two of the first five books of the Bible that make up the Jewish Torah, or Law.

### **Living the Gospel—Compassion**

Jesus' words call us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. To be able to do this, we need to picture ourselves in their place—experiencing all that they are experiencing; not imposing our own values and circumstances. To see ourselves in the place of another is the key to responding with compassion. The origin of the word “compassion” means experiencing with. If we are able to truly “experience with” another person perhaps then we can genuinely recognize and respond to their needs.

### **Gospel Focus – Love your neighbor as yourself**

There is an implicit, or understood, commandment within the command to love your neighbor as yourself. That is, we must first love ourselves. Whilst to say someone “loves themselves” is used as a criticism of a person who is a bit too vain, that is not what is intended here. If we are to love others as we love ourselves we must first be content and happy with who we are. It is only when we are comfortable with who we are that we are able to reach out to those around us with compassion.

### **Gospel Reflection Questions for Teens**

- Q. Why would Jesus' answer have been challenging to the Pharisees?*
- Q. How might loving God with all your heart, soul and mind affect the way you live your life?*
- Q. In your local situation, who are the "neighbors" not loved as we love ourselves?*
- Q. What actions can you take to better love your neighbor as you love yourself?*

### **Gospel Reflection Questions for Adults**

- Q. How might bystanders have reacted to Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees?*
- Q. How might loving God with all your heart, soul and mind affect the way you live your life?*
- Q. What actions can you take to better recognize the importance of God in your life?*
- Q. In your local situation, who are the "neighbors" not loved as we love ourselves?*
- Q. What actions can you take to better love your neighbor as you love yourself?*

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A full copy of the readings for the week can be found on the U.S. Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/102520.cfm>

Sunday Connection (Family Resource):

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/sunday-connection/>