



THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Cycle B

Deuteronomy 6: 2-6

Hebrews 7: 23-28

Mark 12: 28b-34

GATHERING:

(A crucifix and a bible rest on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

This week we reflect on Jesus teaching in the temple and on the greatest commandments. We prayed last week with Bartimaeus, "Jesus, son of David have pity on me." How did you resist the drag of the crowd this week?
(Members share briefly.)

OPENING PRAYER

(A selection of instrumental music plays as the leader takes up the crucifix. He/She invites members to ask themselves the question, "How much do you love me?" as they receive and hold the crucifix for a few moments. The leader invites members to listen with their hearts as Jesus' arms say it all. The crucifix is passed from member to member. When the crucifix has been passed to all, the community prays as follows.)

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

All: I love you, Lord, my strength.

Leader: 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.

All: I love you, Lord, my strength.

Leader: 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.

All: I love you, Lord, my strength.

Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

(The community dwells in silence for a few minutes.)

Focus Question

Recall a time when you not only heard but really *listened* to someone.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

What does it mean to *listen with the heart* to God's commandments in our lives? In a biblical sense, truly hearing or *listening with the heart* involves following through in an act of obedience to what we have heard: welcoming the word, believing it and acting on it.

In today's gospel, a scribe, who seems to be sincere, asks,

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.

We hear his words again today. Jesus stands in the temple and shares with us the secret of true homage offered to God – love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus' words fuse together the two central commands from Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19: 18. He proclaims the two great loves that all of Judaism and Christianity call for.

God loves Israel completely. The Shema, "Hear O Israel...", is a profound expression of faith and response to this love. Israel and we are invited into a covenant, a relationship of love. Our total self: heart, soul, mind and strength is called to be engaged in the love of God. Law observance was Israel's response to the covenant. God wants obedience to laws, but much more than that.

Loving with one's whole heart reveals that love cannot be measured. Love and legalism cannot stand side by side. Open to and filled with the Spirit, we become aware that God's friendship with us leads to intimacy. In this intimacy, I see God, knowing God sees me as I am. I see others through God's eyes. Loving God is impossible without loving my neighbor. Obeying the commandment to love my neighbor, anyone who might need help, enables me to put into practice my love of God.

In the introduction to his recent encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI writes: "Love is now no longer a mere 'command'; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."

Jesus models this love for us. Sent by God to fulfill the plan of salvation, he is the high priest, the new covenant, the sacrifice offered out of love. Calvary is an ever-present event. It is present in our reflection on the crucifix and in our eucharistic celebration. It is in our midst as people continue to suffer from violence, war and natural disasters. It is in our midst as we strive daily to respond in love to God's love always being poured out for us in Jesus. May the passion of Jesus Christ live always in our hearts.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week's scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ How open are your arms to the people in your life, to the world around you?
- ◆ Share an experience of whole-hearted love.
- ◆ How do you feel when you are not listened to?
- ◆ How does this week's gospel invite or challenge you to live differently?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, "What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?" After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Read and reflect on Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical letter, **Deus Caritas Est**. Check for it at your local Christian Book Store or online at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals
- ◆ In light of the media's constant presentation of violence, war and natural disasters, talk with the children or grandchildren in your life about the importance of listening with the heart to God's invitation to love God and our neighbor.
- ◆ Set aside a day or a weekend for retreat. Listen to the Lord's love for you and write down what you hear. Search for a retreat house in your area
- ◆ Contact Big Brothers or Big Sisters to volunteer your time with a young person who needs someone to model love and listening in their life. Call 1-800-237-5437.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(Inviting the community to a few moments of breathprayer, the leader says, “Breathing in, say to yourself, I listen. . . Breathing out, say to yourself, You are here. . .” After several breaths, the leader says, “In the stillness, be with God and listen.” After several minutes, the community prays as follows.)

All: O God, you constantly invite me to listen with my heart. You stir and call in the most unlikely places of my life among people and situations that I dismiss as not revealing your presence. Beckon me to my inner being where I can discover you and listen to your commands. Open me so that I will hear your word and act on it. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

(The session concludes with the singing of “Holy Lord We Praise Thy Name.” The song may be found on the internet.)

