

Closing Prayer

Lord our God,
you are the one God and there is no other.

Give us grace to hear and heed
the great commandment of your kingdom,
that we may love you with all our heart
and love our neighbour as ourselves.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 31, Year B²

CPL • LBC Year B before Advent 4.odt • 2023-03-01

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

The Fourth Sunday before Advent

Sunday between 30 October and 5 November inclusive ·
Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Principal Service readings

Deuteronomy 6.1-9

The essence of the law

Psalms 119.1-8

In praise of the law

Hebrews 9.11-14

The purifying blood of Christ

Mark 12.28-34

The first commandment

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The first commandment

²⁸One of the scribes came near and heard the religious authorities disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' ²⁹Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." ³¹The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' ³²Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; ³³and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength," and "to love one's neighbour as oneself" – this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' ³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Mark 12.28-34 NRSV¹

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

At the beginning of chapter 12 Jesus tells a audience that includes scribes and Pharisees, who are questioning his authority (11.27-33), the parable of the tenants (12.1-11), after which they want to arrest him (1.12). In this hostile setting, quite remarkably, a scribe, who has been impressed with Jesus' answers, comes forward and asks Jesus a question, 'Which is the first of all the commandment?' (12.28). Given the hostile setting, Jesus had every right to be suspicious. However, Jesus answers the question thoroughly: to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength (see Deuteronomy 6.4-5). Although the scribe had only asked for the first commandment, Jesus gives him the second one, 'love your neighbour as yourself' (12.31). Here, he quotes Leviticus 19.18. Jesus concludes, 'There is no other commandment greater than these' (12.31). The scribe then relies, agreeing with what Jesus has said, and adds to it, referring to the book of Hosea;

For it is lover that I desire, not sacrifice,
and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

Hosea 6.6

saying that to love one's neighbour is more important than burnt-offerings (12.33). Seeing the man's engagement with the question, and the wisdom of his answer, Jesus says, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' (12.34).

Mark concludes his story by saying, 'no one dared to ask any more questions' (12.34). Jesus avoids the snares, continues with his teaching, and attracts even more followers,

Quotations

1

The 'commandment' of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be 'commanded' because it has first been given.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–2022

2

To be commanded to love God at all, let alone in the wilderness, is like being commanded to be well when we are sick, to sing for joy when we

are dying of thirst, to run when our legs are broken. But this is the first and great commandment nonetheless. Even in the wilderness - especially in the wilderness - you shall love him.

A room called remember: uncollected pieces / Frederick Buechner. 1984

3

Moving from teaching university students to living with mentally handicapped people was, for me at least, a step toward the platform where the father embraces his kneeling son. Step from bystander to participant, from judge to repentant sinner, from teacher about love to being loved as the beloved. It is also the place where I have to let go of all I most want to hold on to. It is the place that confronts me with the fact that truly accepting love, forgiveness, and healing is often much harder than giving it. It is the place beyond earning, deserving, and rewarding. It is the place of surrender and complete trust. Each little step toward the centre seemed like an impossible demand, a demand requiring me to let go one more time from wanting to be in control, to give up one more time the desire to predict life, to die one more time to the fear of not knowing where it all will lead, and to surrender one more time to a love that knows no limits. And still, I knew that I would never be able to live the great commandment to love without allowing myself to be loved without conditions or pre-requisites.

The return of the prodigal son: a story of homecoming / Henri J. M. Nouwen. 1991

Related topics

For further study:

Love; charity; justice; two great commandments; morality; commandments; Beatitudes; virtues of faith, hope and love; service; conversion; discipleship