

23rd SUNDAY after PENTECOST

November 31, 2021

COLLECT: ALMIGHTY AND MERCIFUL GOD, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Psalm 119:1-8

Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14

Gospel: Mark 12:28-34

THE SERMON: in today's lesson of the Old Testament lesson of Deuteronomy, Moses has gathered all the people of Israel together. They are about to enter the Promised land, but Moses knows he won't go into it with them. He is worried about the people's fidelity to God. Looking back on his experiences with the people he wants to be certain that, after his death, they will be faithful to God and follow his commandments.

He tells them that God wants him to teach them and their children to observe, the decrees and all the commandments everyday of their lives. If they do, they will live long lives and God will be with them.

He commands them to observe them diligently, to teach them to their children, to recite them day and night, to bind them as a sign on their hands, wear them as an emblem on their foreheads and post them on the doorposts of their house and gates.

*(The **phylactery** is a small leather box containing Hebrew scripture strapped to the forehead of men at morning prayer as a reminder to keep the law.*

*The **Mezuzah** is the symbol attached to the doorposts and gates of Jewish homes. It is a visible sign that it is a Jewish home and a reminder of being obedient to the law.)*

Moses then teaches them a specific phrase: **Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.**

This phrase establishes that Israel has only one God and demands a total commitment to him. These are the words that Moses wants the people to teach their children and for them to faithfully observe.

This is now known as the Shema Prayer and is central to the Jewish faith. You can still hear it being prayed in temples, synagogues and in Jewish homes today. This has a significance that is equal as the Lord's Prayer is for Christians.

In today's Gospel of Mark, Jesus is asked which is the first commandment? He answered, the greatest commandment of all is: "Hear O' Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love he Lord with all your heart, and with all our soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

These are familiar words, aren't they? They are the words of the Shema, the very words Moses taught to the Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land. This prayer which Jesus considered the greatest commandment of all showed that through the ages, the Jews were still showing an obedience to God.

So, the answer to the question that is often asked: What would Jesus do?
The answer is a very simple one: Love them just as you would love yourself.
Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes