

YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD THIRTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 31 OCTOBER 2021

Jesus said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

The gospel reading for this Sunday has jumped two chapters because Mark's gospel ends in this liturgical year in two weeks' time on the thirty third Sunday in Ordinary time.

Last week's gospel described how Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem, the holy city, and healed a blind man, Bartimaeus, who followed Jesus down the road. He followed what became known as the Christian 'way'

In this week's gospel, Jesus is already in Jerusalem answering a question from one of the scribes. Instead of the question from the scribe being a trap for Jesus, the question is one of enquiry seeking an honest answer. It is a genuine question!

Today, we know very well when an honest question is presented because of our extraordinary exposure to media. We know when a question is hostile, we know when an answer is guarded or ideological or the respondent says nothing at all.

The scribe who would have been an expert in the Jewish law asks the fundamental question which is always relevant, we ask it ourselves: *which is the first of all commandments?*

The Jewish law had 613 commandments not just the 10 commandments that Christians observe. Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy (6:4) the beautiful Shema prayer which is part of the daily prayer of praying Jews (to this day).

Basically, it says that we must love God with everything we have.

Love God totally. Give God everything.

Why would we do that? So many people today do not believe in God's existence, are satisfied by sciences and their answers to human questions; they live in a secular world both inside their head and in their lives.

But for Christian believers, God is not 'thing' or an abstract being, but a person, who has taken the initiative to inform us we have a destiny with God. The bible tells us so! We are required to respond to this love's initiative. The scriptures describe how God has invited us into love; it records the promise and the joy of being one with God.

Jesus added the other commandment: love other people as we love ourselves. God is the source of this love too. But we have a problem – we do not know how to love ourselves and therefore have difficulty in loving other people. The example of Jesus who loved us to the end heals our self-criticism and in following his example we get to love ourselves and other people. The Spirit of Jesus makes all things possible.

The scribe understands what Jesus has said. He has gone to the heart of Jesus' response. Yes, sacrifice is important but loving God, others and self as people is fundamental. Sacrifice has its place but love relationships come first: self, others and God. Did the scribe follow Jesus on 'the way', the same 'way' trod by Bartimaeus?

Now another blind man appears in the gospel. Perhaps Mark is telling us that the apostles are 'blind' like Bartimaeus.

Father Gary Walker SSC

[St Columbans Mission Society](#)

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/103121.cfm>

