

## **November 4, 2018**

### **Thirty- First Sunday of Ordinary Time**

As you know, the first reading at Sunday Mass, usually corresponds directly to the Gospel reading. Most Sundays we hear how Jesus fulfills what God first revealed to the people of Israel, the Jews. That connection is very strong in today's readings.

When we look at the first reading taken from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy we need to understand that Jews so revered these verses Jews that they memorized them and said them daily, something like many Catholics memorize and pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary. Faithful Jews prayed these words every day: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, you God, with all your heart, and with all you soul and with all your strength." It is safe to say that Jesus most likely prayed these same words daily.

Jesus builds on this central teaching of the Jewish faith and takes it to the next level. He says to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and then he adds 'the mind'. Why did Jesus at that phrase? Could be because the Hellenistic culture that was so influential at the time placed so much emphasis on the power of the mind? We don't know for sure. We do know both the teaching in Deuteronomy and the teaching of Jesus have the same point. We are to love God with everything we have, with our whole person both the mind and the soul. He then also makes the very clear connection that the love of God and the love of neighbor that we cannot separate from one another.

We have seen many acts of mindless violence in recent years, months and days. The most recent one being the attack last week at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. How do we respond to such evil out of love for God and neighbor, with the love of our whole heart, soul, mind and strength?

We begin with what it means to love God with all our heart. To love with all our heart means to be willing to feel deeply the pain of this kind of attack not to just shake our heads and say to ourselves "how awful" and then move on. Rather, to stay with the feelings until they are written on our heart.

To love with all our soul means to take painful experiences of life to prayer, and not just a quick prayer of intercession, but with the deep prayer of reflection. To allow the feeling of heart to be a part of that prayer experience. We need to with the Church with attitude of the prayer that we find in many of the Eucharistic Prayers, that pray for the peace and salvation of the whole world, not just for ourselves. We need to remember the intercession that we pray every Good Friday, when we honor the “Jewish people to whom the Lord our God spoke first.”

To love with all our mind means to be open to learning and dialogue. Numerous e-mails have gone back and forth this weekend among the members of the Crossroads Covenant Community, first to express sympathy and solidarity with the congregation of our covenant partner, Temple B’nai Torah. Various thoughts and reflections followed. One of the members of the temple quoted the Paulist Priest Edward Flannery, in his book, “The Agony of the Jews,” where he wrote, “The vast majority of Christians, even well educated, are all but totally ignorant of what happened to Jews in history and of the culpable involvement of the Church.” We as Christian need to know in our minds how we have been culpable of religious prejudice in order to use our minds to overcome it.

To love with all our strength means that we be strong in resisting bigotry in all its forms that we be strong enough to speak up when makes a slur, or a joke that makes fun of Jews or any other group of people. We need to be strong to keep constant vigilance of our own attitudes that are a part of our psyche because prejudice is so much a part of our culture.

Loving God with all our heart, soul mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves is no easy task. We need the help and support of each other and most especially the wisdom, the grace and power that comes from Jesus. Jesus has given us this one command to love God and neighbor and he will also give us the his heart, his soul, his mind and his strength to live the commands that he gives us.