**Readings for November 3, 2024 – 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Love is the Highest Law

*In a world that seems filled with division, these readings are comforting. They are simply about a better way – love. Our Psalm and second reading today remind us that we have a God who is our rock, our refuge and fortress. The Lord has conquered even death, and now lives forever. And all this is because of God’s great love for us, which we are asked to give in return.*

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**Opening prayer:** Thank you, God, for always revealing your strength and power to us. Help us to pay attention to your presence in our lives, help us to realize our great need for you, and to respond in love for all that you do for us. Amen.

**Meditation suggestion:** Look over the Psalm and call to mind a few of the ways in which God has been your strength and your fortress.

What were these situations like? How did you know that God was there for you? How did you respond to God?

Think of what those strong words in the Psalm imply. Does this image fit with your own image of God?

Share a few of your thoughts, if you are willing.

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**Reading I** [**Dt 6:2-6**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/6?2)

Moses spoke to the people, saying:  
"Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives,  
all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life.  
Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper the more,  
in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers,  
to give you a land flowing with milk and honey. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God,  
with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.   
Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

Responsorial Psalm [**Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/18?2)

**R. (2)    I love you, Lord, my strength.**I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.  
**R. I love you, Lord, my strength.**  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.  
**R. I love you, Lord, my strength.**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.  
**R. I love you, Lord, my strength.**

Reading II [**Heb 7:23-28**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/hebrews/7?23)

Brothers and sisters: The levitical priests were many  
because they were prevented by death from remaining in office,  
but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away.  
Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him,   
since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest:  
holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens.  
He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day,  
first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself.   
For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests,  
but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law,  
appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

Gospel [**Mk 12:28b-34**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/mark/12?28)

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "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.*  
There is no other commandment greater than these."   
The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying,  
'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart,  
with all your understanding, with all your strength,  
and to love your neighbor as yourself'  
is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."  
And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him,  
"You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Related Reflections

**Jesus fulfills the law – in love**

*Love—devoted love for God and others—is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.* Everything—all God’s ways in the world, all God’s will for us—hangs on these two commandments: love God and love others. Or, in other words, *love is the fulfillment of the Law.*

Other early Christians got the message. The Apostle Paul sums this up as neatly as any of them, in Romans 13:8-10:

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the Law.*

Jesus oriented his life around love—not holiness, not purity, not strength or power, not truth or even wisdom, not even justice or peace. He oriented his life around *love*: devoted love for God and devoted love for others. And in doing so, Jesus demonstrated true holiness and purity, he showed true strength and power, he revealed true wisdom, he carved out the path toward true justice and peace.

In other words, *all the things the Law pointed to—holiness, purity, wisdom, truth, mercy, justice, peace—Jesus fulfilled them all in love.*

And likewise, when we orient our life around love, we too fulfill the Law. If we orient our life around striving for holiness or spotless purity, we will miss the fullness of God’s will for us. If we orient our life around some pure search for truth, we will miss the fullness of God’s will for us. If we orient our life around a relentless quest for justice, or even peace, we will miss the fullness of God’s will for us.

But when we orient our life around love in the way of Jesus—devoted love for God expressed in devoted love for others—then we discover true holiness and purity, true strength and wisdom, true justice and peace along the way.

The question is, *do we really believe it?* Are we willing to put it into practice? Relentlessly, persistently, above all else, seeking to love God and others?

*Michael Pahl, from his blog:* <https://michaelpahl.com/2018/06/05/jesus-fulfills-the-law-in-love/>

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**‘Whoever dwells in love, dwells in God’**

This Sunday we hear a scribe ask Jesus what commandment is the greatest. And Jesus’ response is: to love God and neighbour.

St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) in *On Loving God* considered four questions: why should we love God? How can we experience God’s love? How can we love our neighbour? And how can we love ourselves?

St Bernard understands that loving God is a spiritual journey, and is therefore not something that is ever done perfectly. Rather we perfect how we love as we live. We love God because God is love and therefore lovely and loveable in Godself.

But we know that we love other things in addition to God, and so the journey towards loving God more perfectly involves the work of ordering our loves such that we grow to love God first. All the other things we love can be good, but all our goods come from God. It might be a selfish form of love at first, to love God for the blessings he gives us. As we grow in love we will love God not just for his blessings to us, but first and foremost, we will love God out of gratitude for creating us and gifting us with our existence.

But what if we cannot see God or feel that we’re not in the right state to be in love with God? St Augustine said: “do not think yourself wholly unsuited to seeing God. Whoever dwells in love, dwells in God.”

So if you think you cannot see anything of God, love whoever is nearest to you. And look inside that to see where the love is coming from. And thus, in a way, you will see God. By loving your neighbour you have begun a spiritual journey that will find its rest and its end in God.

*From the CPLO and the Jesuit Institute, Oct. 26, 2020*

**Love – The Foundation**

Jesus called us to an ideal love when he said, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love (John 15:9). He made his instructions a little clearer when he said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (15:12). That statement is a foundation of Christian morality.

The scriptures tell us a lot about what real love looks like. **Love is the highest law** – love directed to God, to neighbor, to self and all creation. When a Pharisee asked Jesus to tell him which commandment of the Jewish law was the greatest, Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments in two statements. (See our Gospel reading).

The reign of God is love. The reign, or kingdom of God is the rule of God’s love over the hearts of people, and a new social order based on unconditional love of God and others. Love means being deeply concerned about the dignity and welfare of other people. It means respecting all life because we are in relationship with all life. This is central to Christian life.

Today, the Ten Commandments continue to be fundamental moral precepts. Yet they are the minimum requirements for a life of love. Jesus told his followers not to disregard these commandments, but to go beyond them to fulfill the great commandment of love.

**“What does love look Like? It has feet to go to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of others.” - St. Augustine.**

* *From Confirmed in a Faithful Community, Candidate’s Handbook, St. Mary’s Press*

Discussion Questions

In the Gospel passage, why do you think Jesus is pleased with the scribe’s statement?

What do you think Jesus means when he talks about “the kingdom of God?” Talk a little about the “new social order” that Jesus is introducing to his Jewish community.

Talk further about the four questions that St. Bernard raises (see the CPLO reflection). Which one seems hardest to answer, or to live out?

Where are you most experiencing (or seeing) God’s love in your life right now?

Why did Jesus add the words, “And love your neighbor as yourself” to the commandment to love God with our whole heart? Was it found throughout the Hebrew culture? How do we show love for God? Are most of the Ten Commandments about loving our neighbor?

**Closing prayer:**

Lord Jesus, Stir your Holy Spirit within me. Let me see as you see, and love as you love, without counting the cost. Amen*. (Allan F. Wright)*

***Our Weekly Focus Thought (adapted from Pope Francis)***

“To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must allow ourselves to be astonished.”

*How was I astonished this week?*

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***Other thoughts for the coming week***

**Celebrating our saints – The embodiment of love**

Around this time of year, we celebrate the great feast of All Saints. It is a day to honor all those holy men and women of God who lived their lives trying to remain faithful to these two great commandments. The reason they achieved sainthood is because they focused on the first – and greatest – of the commandments. Their very lives were a love song devoted to God whom they sought to know and embrace. Animated by such love for the Creator, one must extend that love outward to others, especially to those who seem most unlovable.

The example of these holy people can serve as both an inspiration and a challenge to us. Their lives were not lived out easily and their quest for God often led them down difficult paths. Loving God brought many of them to a point of conversion, of turning their lives around.

While some had visions and experienced extraordinary phenomena such as ecstasies, such expressions of Christian life have been neither central nor common. Love of God and neighbor in humble service remains forever the pulse beat of the Christian vocation.

Love of God exposes us at times to the very raw edges of life. It opens us up to pain as well as to joy. It makes us vulnerable and ready to give. It deepens and stretches our capacity to care, to reach out, to see ourselves and others as lovable in the eyes of God.

- Prayer Time, Cycle B, Faith Sharing Reflections on the Gospel, Renew International

**Also a saint-related thought from Fr. John Kavanaugh, S.J. -**

The wisdom shared by all the saints, after all, was not about the particular talents or deficits one brought to the world. It was about the wholeheartedness of love, a willingness to give it all away. They also seemed to know that wholeheartedness was not a matter of “once and for all,” or something that would happen overnight. It was, rather, a matter of opening up their entire lives to the transforming grace of God.

*The late Fr. Kavanaugh was a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University. His writings are published on*[**www.liturgy.slu.edu**](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu)

**A perfect example of this: St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941)**

*“A single act of love makes the soul return to life.” St. Maximilian Kolbe*

Learn more about this important saint whose feast day we celebrate on August 14, the day he died a painful death in a Nazi concentration camp. Fr. Kolbe, a Polish priest, asked the guard to take his life in place of someone else – a father with a wife and children.

- <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-maximilian-mary-kolbe/#google_vignette>

**And we might naturally think of the work of Mother Teresa (St. Teresa of Calcutta). Here are her words:**

*“I never look at the masses as my responsibility. I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other.”*

Can you think of some other saints who showed us how to live “wholeheartedly” so that we might bring about a more just and loving world?