

## REFLECTION FOR THE THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

This Sunday's liturgy invites us to discover that the path of love for God and our brothers and sisters is the only way to live a full life and a meaningful life. Love allows us to live in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters who walk alongside us.

The first reading presents us with the beginning of the “Shema Israel,” (שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל) which is Hebrew for “Hear, O Israel,” the great affirmation of faith that every pious Israelite made twice a day. It reminded us that God was the fundamental center around which the entire life of the believer was articulated and built. *“Listen, Israel: The Lord our God is the one Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.”*

In the Gospel, Jesus was asked by a scribe what is the first of all the commandments. It was a meaningful question, since it was a discussion that existed between the various teachers in Israel at that time. Jesus answers with the “Shema Israel.” Jesus says that the first commandment is to love God with all our strength, with all our heart, with all our soul. What is interesting is that he immediately adds the second commandment: *“You must love your neighbor as yourself.”* And then Jesus adds: *“There is no commandment greater than these.”*

Jesus thus defines the principle that must guide the life and commitment of his disciples: **love**. This love must be centered on God and on our brothers and sisters, without exception. St. John will later say that no one can claim to love God if they do not love their brother. It is in loving our brothers and sisters that love for God is made concrete. Whenever people have wanted to separate these “loves,” paths of hatred and violence have emerged.

We need only look at what still happens today with extremist religious groups: in the name of serving God, of affirming an absolute love for God, but forgetting to live out this love by loving their brothers and sisters, they kill, rape, destroy, and sow violence and hatred.

The same thing happens when people want to affirm their love for their brothers and sisters without any reference to God. Let us look at our history and see what happened with the French Revolution or the Marxist regimes: in the name of wanting to build a humanity without God, they filled the prisons (and continue to do so) with innocent people, sowing terror, persecution, and violence. A humanity centered on man without God becomes the scene of the greatest violence, and the same happens with a humanity centered on God without man. This is why Jesus

insisted to his disciples that love should be the light of their lives, a love for one's brothers and sisters to the point of giving one's life for them, By loving one's enemies, with God as the foundation, it is this God who loves everyone; and who rains on the just and the unjust; the God who wants everyone to be brothers and sisters, because everyone is his child.

To be able to live this total and complete love, we need the power of the Holy Spirit within us, and we can be sure that God accompanies us with his Spirit, because we have Jesus Christ as our eternal High Priest as the second reading tells us. Christ intercedes for us. Christ goes with us on the paths of our lives. Let us learn to make love the ideal of our existence, as our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, taught us. Loving God above all things through a total love for our brother and sister, made up of mercy and forgiveness, peace and justice, solidarity and listening.

May God-love sow his love in the hearts of all of us and make us instruments of love. Amen.