

## **The Saints Go Marching In**

Ephesians 1:15–18, Mark 12:28–34

In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus has just avoided two attempts to trip him up. In the first Scribes, are trying to get him to offend both Romans and Jews with a question about taxes, and in the second, they are trying to corner him with a question about resurrection (Mark 12:13–27). A scribe looking on is impressed: Jesus "answered them well," so the scribe asks a debated question of the day "which is the greatest commandment?"

Jesus answers by quoting both Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18. You know them both well: love God with all your heart, soul, might, and mind, and your neighbor as yourself. In Leviticus, the instruction is about community life and giving care and respect for the poor and vulnerable, including "the alien," and to resist the urge toward vengeance.

The scene is of two teachers, both very familiar with Hebrew Scripture, coming to a meeting of the minds about the essence of the law. Mark is painting a picture of agreement and reconciliation across lines of anticipated hostility. Scribes are typically Jesus' opponents, but not here.

The scribe does not convert to become a follower of Jesus, and Jesus does not ask him to do so. The two teachers remain on their own different paths, but find common ground. They respect and affirm each other and then go on their way, all the while living out the great commandment. They embody the very love across expected lines of hostility God has commanded them to live. This is the life of a Christian — also called a saint.

This Sunday is All Saints Day Sunday. All Saints Sunday has several messages. It is sometimes called the church's Memorial Day. It is the day we remember those who have died during the past year and loved ones who have died in previous years and give thanks for the gift of their lives with us. And we celebrate giving thanks that they are in the church triumphant with God. They have journeyed into God's house in which there are many mansions. A second truth we remember on All Saints Sunday is that all believers are saints. We believe every Christian is a saint by the grace of God.

Sometimes we think the title of Saint is a title that one must earn. But scripture tells us all the faithful are saints. We sometimes think a particularly good person or one strong in faith is a saint. People called saints are sometimes seen as in a Christian Hall of Fame. The New Testament never uses the term saint as a special hall of fame group of Christians. The New Testament uses the term saint to refer to the whole church and to every believer.

We recognize both the reality of death and grieve over it and hear Jesus' great command to love God and Neighbor (Mark 12:28–34) as reminders of sainthood.

Today, in this world that witnesses the massacre at Tree of Life Synagogue, the "caravan of migrants" traveling north seeking asylum from violence, and the ashes of Matthew Shepard interred at the National Cathedral, loving the neighbor as yourself is the means by which we live out our sainthood.

The insistence on the value of life and all lives, the determination to recognize all as saints in our midst, and the charge to embody the life-giving love of God is to be celebrated now because the operative commandment in the world today is "hate thy neighbor."

Jesus is clear about the impression he wants us to make in this world. Jesus didn't say let your judgment and bias and prejudice shine so the world will be divided. Jesus said Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

*Bob*