

## **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, <sup>2</sup>so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.

<sup>3</sup>Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

<sup>6</sup>Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup>Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup>and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

## **Mark 12:28-34**

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;’ <sup>30</sup>you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup>The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” <sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; <sup>33</sup>and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

## For All the Saints

### 1. HOW UNUSUAL

The story we just read from the Gospel of Mark is quite unusual because, from the beginning of Mark's Gospel the scribes have been enemies of Jesus. They charged Jesus with blasphemy for forgiving a man of his sins (that was something a priest was supposed to do). They didn't like his choice of company at the dinner table. They accused him of working for the devil. They didn't like the fact that his disciples ate without washing their hands. They actively sought to kill Jesus, and conspired with Judas Iscariot to do so. But here we have a scribe who seems to get along with Jesus, agreeing with him on what the most important Law happens to be, and a scribe who Jesus says is near to the kingdom of God.

### 2. CLOSE ONLY COUNTS IN HORSESHOES AND HAND GRENADES

Close, but not quite there (someone once taught me the saying, "close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.") This scribe is "close" to the kingdom of God, but he's not quite there. You see, scribes specialized in the law, and let's be honest, laws are mainly about *preventing harm*. Laws are put in place to keep people from getting hurt. A person who follows the laws may do no harm, *but there is a big difference between doing no harm, and doing good*. Today is All Saints Day, and when we think about the saints that we have known in our lives, we don't think of people did nothing to hurt us; rather we think of people who acted in ways that helped us. I'd like you to have a look at this video to show you what I'm talking about (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZGghmwUcbQ>)

### 3. WHEN PIETY AND ORTHODOXY GET TOO MUCH ATTENTION

Now let me ask you, is the man who is the main character of this commercial a saint? What do you think? To an older woman trying to move a heavy cart every day, he's a saint. To a hungry street dog, he's a saint. To a mother who begs so her daughter can go to school, and to the little girl who is finally able to attend school, this man is a saint.

And what distinguishes this man from the scribe who agreed with Jesus and was close to the kingdom of God? The man in the commercial didn't just *believe* that the most important law is to love God and love neighbor; the man in this commercial acted upon this belief, and just as his kindness brought joy to others, it

brought joy to him. His life was a full life, full of feeling, full of love, full of friendship.

It's easy for Christians to sell ourselves short of a full life, to come close to the kingdom of God without actually entering it, by withholding our love, particularly from the stranger – as Jesus said, if you love only those who you know you're no different from a thief. Like the scribes, we might engage with Jesus only on an intellectual level, finding agreement in our beliefs, but never acting upon those beliefs, as if our heads were not connected to our hearts. Like Jesus' critics we may get wrapped up in questions of doctrine that blind us to the beauty of loving acts; I wonder how many Christians would view this video and somehow judge this man based upon his religious doctrine (“hmm, does he confess Jesus Christ to be his Savior? Does he believe in the Holy Trinity?”) And in so doing, are they not acting just like the scribes who criticized Jesus for acting in ways that didn't fit into their notion of orthodoxy or their tradition? I'm reminded of the lesson we read a month ago, when the disciples tell Jesus that they saw some guy casting out demons in Jesus name and stop him because he didn't belong to their group. And what does Jesus say? *Leave him alone. Whoever is not against us is for us.* In their concern for protocol, the disciples were blind to good works of a stranger. They had forgotten the most important of all the laws: love God; love neighbor.

#### 4. SAINTS

Today we honor the saints, not because they were intellectual giants who could explain Christian doctrine and argue convincingly for the Christian faith (though they might have been that). We honor the saints not because they were bastions of piety living a clean, pure life. (though they may have been that as well). We honor the saints because they got outside of themselves, outside a concern for personal righteousness or personal piety and instead acted on our behalf. We honor them because they actively loved us; that's what we remember about them. They touched our lives because that's what they wanted to do, to touch us with active love. They're not famous people – I didn't notice the names of any celebrities listed among those we honored – but they're celebrities in our book, and so today we celebrate them. And I would guess that part of the reason you are here now is because of the love they showed you sometime in the past.

May we do as they have done, showing love to those in our midst, particularly the stranger, the ones who had no “connection” with us that would have made them feel in any way obligated to treat us well. And may we be empowered to be saints to strangers in our midst.