

November 4, 2018 – 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Fr. John Edmunds, ST

St. Mark describes a scene where Jesus and a scribe have a dialogue. The scribe echoed Jesus' explanation of the first of all the commandments. "Teacher you are right in saying, God is One and there is no other... and to love him with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength ... and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." However, if Jesus and the scribe agree that God is Lord alone, that loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves are the most important of all the commandments, why did Jesus say merely "you are not far?" Why didn't he say "you got it 100% right?" What was the scribe missing in his understanding of the first of all the commandments that Jesus saw as essential? What the scribe omitted in his list is the first word of Jesus' understanding of the commandments: "Hear!" To draw even closer to the kingdom of God we not only have to acknowledge the one God, to love God wholly and to love neighbor, we also need to hear. Hear what? Hear How? The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy (in the first reading), which Jesus quotes from in his response to the scribe, says a bit more about hearing. According to Moses we are supposed to "take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today." Maybe what Jesus wanted the scribe to hear was that the kingdom of God was not out there, but in here. If we don't take those words to heart, than we'll never quite get them. You can keep the commandments, you can know all the catechism answers, you can read the Bible, you can do all the right things, but if you aren't hearing the Word in a way that takes the message of Jesus to heart, then you never quite warm enough to reach the kingdom of God.

The temptation is to remain content with being "not far from the kingdom of God." You can imagine the scribe saying to himself, "Hey, that's pretty good,

I'm not far from the kingdom of God," and going home happy. But if we remain "not far" then we never get warmer, we never get hot, we never attain the object of our search. If I ask you how much is two plus two and you say "three" and I respond, "You're not too far from the right answer" is that good enough? No, you keep trying until you get the correct answer. If I ask how you spell potato and you say, "potatoe" would it be sufficient to say, "not far from the correct spelling" or would your correct it? If you put on a pair of shoes in the store and the clerk asks whether they feel comfortable and you say, "it feels one size too small" would she be satisfied to respond, "Not too far from the right fit." No, she'd find a shoe which was more comfortable. The same has to be true with our own search for kingdom of God. It's not good enough to be "not far" from the kingdom. We just shouldn't rest contented until we find the Lord. We're not far from the kingdom of God when we pray. We're getting warmer when we take the words of our prayer to heart. We're not far from the kingdom of God when we care for our families. We're getting warmer when we treat everyone we meet as a child of God. We're not far from the kingdom when we come to church. We're getting warmer when we bring someone else to church with us.

"Hear, O Israel." It is only when we hear the love of God calling to us that the Christian life makes sense. Unless you hear God speaking a word of forgiveness and mercy toward you, forgiving your neighbor doesn't make sense. Unless you hear of God showering upon you graces and blessings, a life of generosity doesn't make sense. Unless you hear the call of God to join in the glory, sharing the good news as an evangelizer doesn't make sense. You need the music of God's love to make sense of the dance of the Christian life.

So today let's resolve to hear the summons of Jesus to a fuller, richer, whole-hearted, even passionate journey toward the kingdom of God.