



Thirty first Sunday Ordinary Time 2006

Deuteronomy 6: 2-6 Hebrews 7:23-28 Mark 12: 28-34

A religion is usually identified by the threefold elements of creed, code and cult.

The code of Judaism was enshrined in the Decalogue, the ten Commandments. The most important part was the prayer with which it begins and which was recited with great fervour.

Hear, O Israel!

The Lord is our God, the Lord alone Therefore, you shall love the Lord, our God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

This is the commandment that gives meaning to everything else. The importance of the commandment is stressed in the next phrases that say that it must not just be memorised but must be part of a person’s very identity.

It is no wonder then when Jesus was asked about the primary commandment he recited the prayer from Deuteronomy. In Exodus 20. there is a list of commandments that spell out in some detail the community’s duty to God and its duty to one another.

Jesus combines all the latter commandments by naming them as a “second” commandment.

‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. This summing up of human relationships is found in Leviticus 19:18, a book which expands on the code of Judaism with practical applications. The combination of these two separate texts into one reveals the heart of humankind’s response to God

The scribe who had posed the question congratulated Jesus on his answer and then went on to affirm the truth of the prayer. He added the insight, that the essence of that prayer is higher than all other acts of worship.

Jesus in turn congratulates the scribe and adds that his insight has shown how close he is to the heart of God. This beautiful exchange between the two men rendered the bystanders silent. This was an occasion where to say any more would intrude on the atmosphere.

What was Mark trying to say to the fledgling Christian community by recording the story in this form?

One inference that we can draw is that Mark was expressing what the community had come to believe, namely that provided that the spirit of the law was observed then particulars would fall into place.

We have to remember that the Church had now assumed a Gentile form where, if the Jewish scriptures were to be retained, then the people had to know that it was the

spirit of these scriptures that were the revealed will of God, not the literal understanding.

The Jewish scriptures have played an important role in the formation and understanding of the Christian community since the beginning. To understand the Gospels, require that we be familiar with the sacred journey and writings of the Jewish people.

It would be difficult to separate ourselves from their influence just as it is impossible to separate a language from the influence of other languages.

To attempt to do so would be to deprive ourselves of so much richness.

This means then, that we are open to the spiritual gifts that are offered to us through the holy lives of people from other faiths.

As the letter to the Hebrews uses Melchizedek, a pagan priestly king as a type of Christ, we too can look beyond our own community for models of good living.

The new priesthood of the Christian community was modelled on a worship of God through transformed hearts not on a repetition of sacrifices.

The transforming life of Jesus has brought about the new creation.

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