

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

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The Laws for Eternal Life

Wherever we are, we follow numerous rules, laws, and norms. Rules and Laws are necessary to enable the smooth functioning, operation, and management of human life in society and communities. From the beginning of human development, rules and laws have existed in some way, shape, and form. The earliest known evidence of recorded laws date back to around 2,400 B.C. in the form of tablets discovered in the archives of Ebla, now known as Tell Mardikh, in Syria.

As we know, the Jews have also followed different laws in their life. These are the Laws in the Hebrew *Torah*, which means “teaching”, “doctrine”, or “instructions”. It is a word with a broad sense that is less strictly juridical in meaning than the Greek *nomos* that were its strict laws and obligations that governed the citizens. For the Jews, the designated laws from God were transcribed to them through revelation, for the regulation of their conduct in daily life as a nation. Studies on the Jewish Laws affirm that there are 613 laws that all Jews should follow. These 613 laws deal with the rubrics and observances for Jews on matters such as sacrifice, cleanliness, dietary restrictions, clothing, and circumcision. These laws, given to no other nation, were considered the glorious prerogative of Israel from Yahweh. As described in Psalm 147, verses 19 and 20: “He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.” Being directly revealed to the Jews, these laws are considered personal between Yahweh and His people. As such, the laws are understood as the source of joy and a lamp for our feet. This is celebrated in Psalms 1, 19, and 119 that narrate about the laws and the benefits of keeping them as a condition to obtain eternal life.



With so many laws, there was always confusion and argument amongst Jewish religious leaders and teachers as to which law is the greatest. From this background, we understand the scribe's question to Jesus in the Gospel today. In Jesus' answer, all the laws are brought into focus: that the sole and unified purpose through their observances is to concentrate on loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself.

The Markan community, while reading the Gospel after Jesus' death and Resurrection, understood that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the laws and the prophets. In John 1:17 we read: "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Jesus, who loved God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and who loved all his fellow humans with complete self-giving and sacrifice, becomes the ultimate model for all readers of the Gospel. In Jesus, the two and important parts of the Laws are combined, synchronized, and is inextricable. Without one or the other, there is no complete whole. With Christ as our role model, the question to ask ourselves then, when reading the Gospel of Mark, is how our love of God may be verified through love of our neighbour.

Let us reflect: do we love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength; and do we share God's love with our brothers and sisters?

That is a life of communion with everyone!

***Those who say, "I love God,"
and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars;
for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen,
cannot love God whom they have not seen.***

(1 John 1:20)