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Life often demands focus on what we deem important, how we spend our time, what sacrifices we are willing to make and how much it will cost. The rules and resolutions we make are often good indicators of what we consider central to our livelihood.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 22:20-26

Psalms 18

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Matthew 22:34-40

[Full text of the readings](#)

Such was the life of Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, who in 1517, expressed concern for the livelihood of the church. Luther disseminated 95 theses to various church bishops and officials in Wittenberg, Germany, asking for a debate on certain issues within the church that he felt were abuses contrary to the Gospel and Jesus' teachings. His bold proclamation set into motion a series of events that would eventually become the Protestant Reformation.

As Luther was confronted by the theologians of his time for his strong convictions, so too was Jesus confronted by the Pharisees regarding the rules good, upstanding Jews should observe. "Which one of the Torah regulations is at the core of all the other commandments?" With so many rules, some would get more attention than others. The lawyer's question in today's Gospel, while apparently meant to test Jesus, is a legitimate question: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus responds by quoting two commands from the law that, for him, encompass all the others: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Loving God is the first and the greatest commandment; therefore, by extension, loving neighbor as self is equivalent to loving God. Jesus affirms that "the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." While this linking was not unique to Jesus, it does get at the heart of Jesus' mission and ministry.

Matthew had already indicated this link when Jesus gives missionary instructions to his disciples. In sending them out, Jesus assures them that "whoever welcomes you, welcomes me" (Matthew 10:40). Matthew later sums up Jesus' teachings (which is the Gospel reading for the upcoming feast of Christ the King observed on the last Sunday of this liturgical cycle). This fitting conclusion to the liturgical year has the Lord declare: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Our intimacy with the Lord will be based on the love and intimacy we have shared with all of God's people.

The reading from Exodus greatly concretizes Jesus' teaching. The alien, the widow, the orphan and the poor are our neighbors. In most societies, these people are vulnerable in so many ways because they have little or no legal or economic rights, privileges or power. Their survival depends on the goodness, generosity and compassion of others.



(Mark Bartholomew)

We are commanded to treat others with compassion because our loving God is merciful and compassionate toward us, most especially when we are in need. Our God is slow to anger and rich in kindness, not counting our offenses against us. Such loving relationship with God empowers us to call upon God in our need. Jesus and all of Scripture affirm that God hears our cry for help and responds with generosity and compassion. We too need to respond in kind, for we are the living presence and image of God to one another. This demand is difficult for us to practice consistently. With Psalm 18, we acknowledge that only with God's help do we have the courage and strength to offer compassion and love to all, most especially the poor and powerless.

These readings help us focus on what is important in Christian living. How should attunement to the demands of love and compassion for all of God's people impact relationships with fellow Christians?

On this last Sunday of October, a date that has long been called "Reformation Sunday" by Protestant denominations, the church commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We recall the progress that has been made in reconciliation and mutual understanding between the various Christian churches.

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It is important that as Catholic Christians, we too pay attention to this significant commemoration, recalling it, realistically seeing how we might have contributed to it, seeking reconciliation and always striving for Christian unity. Today's readings provide an excellent opportunity to expound on what unites us as Christians. These scriptural passages help us focus on the essential aspects of discipleship while letting go of those things that are not crucial or essential to Christian living.

Focusing on what unites us as Christians — love of God and love of neighbor as self — reaffirms that nothing is more important to Christian living than this.

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