**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

**SINCERE SMILES**

**EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY’S THEME**

***Introducing the Gospel***

*The two great commandments (Mark 12: 28-34)*

During his final days in Jerusalem before the crucifixion, Mark portrays Jesus as confronting three potentially controversial questions, a political question concerning the poll-tax, a theological question concerning the resurrection, and a legal question concerning the greatest commandment. Jesus responds to the third of these issues by emphasising the law of love. The first command is to ‘love the Lord your God’. The second command is to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’.

Our image to stimulate reflection on this passage is *sincere smiles*.

***Core extract from the Gospel (Mark 12: 28-31; for reflection throughout the week)***

One of the scribes asked Jesus,

‘Which commandment is the first of all?’

Jesus answered, ‘The first is,

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

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.”

The second is this,

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

There is no other commandment greater than these.’

***Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)***

Lord God,

we are created in your image.

Give us grace

to love you with all our heart,

to praise you with all our soul,

to trust you with all our mind,

and to serve you with all our strength,

that we may grow in your likeness,

and love others in your name;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

**READING NEXT SUNDAY’S GOSPEL**

**Mark 12: 28-34**

**The First Commandment**

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?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ 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”; and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ 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.

**ENGAGING WITH THE THEME**

***Dwelling with the text (Mark 12: 28-34)***

Begin exploring Mark’s account of Jesus’ encounter with one of the scribes by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

* What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
* What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
* What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
* What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

***Thinking and talking***

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

* What was the purpose of the scribe’s question to Jesus?
* What do you feel about the way Jesus answered this question?
* What do you make of the scribe’s affirmation of Jesus’ answer?
* Why did no one dare ask Jesus further questions?
* What does this narrative say for us today?

***Using your Bible***

Compare how Matthew presents this narrative in the same location as Mark (but posed by the Pharisees), and how Luke relates it and uses it as a springboard for a well-loved parable.

* Matthew 22: 34-40
* Luke 10: 25-37

Examine the Old Testament roots for Jesus’ teaching.

* Deuteronomy 6: 4-5
* Leviticus 19: 18

Explore God’s love for us.

* 1 John 4: 16-21
* Psalm 139: 1-18

***Exploring online***

Widen your exploration of Jesus’ teaching about the great commandment by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

* The Golden Rule
* God is love
* Smile quotes

***Drawing on experience***

The image to stimulate reflection on Jesus’ teaching about the great commandments is *sincere smiles* (not to promote a brand of dentistry, but to acknowledge how the currency of the smiling face can be debased). Draw on your own experience of sincere smiles.

* When have you been transformed by a sincere smile?
* When have you had a positive impact on another through your sincere smile?
* When have you looked for a sincere smile and not found it?

***Creating and making***

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Mark’s programme of teaching about the nature of Jesus’ Messiahship.

* Make a poster displaying the two great commandments.
* Create a collage of smiling faces and the reasons for those smiles.
* Create a display of smile quotes.
* Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of sincere smiles.



**EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME**

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel.

We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

Our invitation then is for you to share your reflections, prayers and photos of your creative work with the Cathedral by emailing them to Nelson.Pike@liverpoolcathedral.org.uk

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary’s Centre in Wales and the St Christopher’s College Trust.



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