

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time



"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone!

*Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your strength.
Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you
today."*

This prayer, which is spoken by Moses to the people of Israel in this Sunday's first reading, is known as the Shema Yisrael (or simply the Shema), a word that means "listen" or "hear" in Hebrew. It is as familiar to Jewish people as the Lord's Prayer is to Christians or the Serenity Prayer is to recovering people. The Shema beautifully summarizes the beliefs of those of the Jewish faith. As Christians, we can embrace this ancient prayer to uncover the rich spiritual meaning found in its declaration.

In recovery, we do not set our own agenda or write our own path, at least if we want to find freedom and happiness. We have known a life clouded by the obsession to act out compulsively in ways contrary to our commitments. Certainly, a life centered on the illusion of control offers little room for loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength.

The Lord alone is our God. Nothing else in this world shall be worshiped above our Lord, and we are to take daily action to be rid of our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments that come between this. This is not just a theoretical claim but is an important spiritual declaration that shapes all of our life. Jesus refers to the Shema when confronted in this Sunday's Gospel reading:

*One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him,
"Which is the first of all the commandments?"*

Jesus replied, "The first is this:

Hear, O Israel!

The Lord our God is Lord alone!

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul,
with all your mind,
and with all your strength.*

The second is this:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no other commandment greater than these."

The work we do in recovery—working the Steps, gathering in fellowship, knowing God through Scripture, and helping others—moves us toward loving God with the fullness of our humanity and desires while learning to love our neighbor as ourselves.

This may seem impossible but let us recall that all things are possible with God. We cooperate with the movement of the Holy Spirit and continue to listen for the agenda set by God. The Twelve Steps of recovery offer an outline to help us know, love, and rely on God. As we make our way through the Steps, we find countless opportunities to love our neighbor as ourselves. However, many of us first need to learn how to love ourselves. We can find the motivation to do so through the love and compassion extended from others in recovery fellowships.

We approach God and our neighbor with the humble and grateful tone found in the Shema Yisrael, a prayer which expresses the totality of God's presence in our life. Each small moment in our day provides the chance to see God reflected in all we do. Each desire of ours can be viewed and understood as a gift from God that moves us closer to Him.

Reflection Questions

- How do you invite God to form your personal agenda, desires, and objectives?
- How have 12-step recovery and faith helped you love your neighbor? Who is your neighbor?
- How have you learned to love yourself?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

Second Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

Gospel: Mark 12:28b-34