

NOVEMBER 4, 2018

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [DT 6:2-6](#)

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them, that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey.

"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."

Responsorial Psalm [PS 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51](#)

Reading 2 [HEB 7:23-28](#)

Gospel [MK 12:28B-34](#)

HOMILY:

I approve this message. What a mistake to discuss politics in a homily, just before an important election! But, with what I've seen on TV, I'm not sure why we'd vote for any of them! After all, according to their opponents, our candidates are nothing but deceptive liars who don't care for us, want to neglect us, and are only "in it" for themselves. While at the same time, candidates speak of themselves as our single best hope and the only way to avoid a disaster. Our single best hope? Disaster unless elected? I think there would be a disaster if we had to endure another week of these ads! There has been plenty of high-charged and negative rhetoric about the upcoming election. This certainly does not reflect the highest parts of our natures.

I have found myself at times thinking to myself, and even talking with others, in almost absolute terms, as if a certain candidate must be elected, to further many of the issues that I am convinced are consistent with my Catholic faith and which would be best for our society. ***Have I gotten carried away? Have you?***

The scriptures today give us an important remedy for over-heated political rhetoric and my own personal opinions about what I can begin to see as the absolute necessity of one candidate being elected as governor, senator, representative, or even local dog catcher. The remedy: "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." This passage, from the Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, is the very center of the Jewish faith, which Jesus displayed in a most devout and perfect way. This teaching is called the SH'MA, from the first word in the original text, translated for us: LISTEN. SH'MA: LISTEN!

Devout Jews were enjoined to recite the SH'MA morning and night, recite it as the last words of their life, carry a parchment with words on arm and forehead, and place it on their door posts. They were to drill it into their children. We Christians claim too claim this prayer as our own.

For in today's gospel, Jesus confirms it as the highest of all teachings. Today and every day, then, Jesus comes to us and says, "**SH'MA! Listen**, I am the Lord alone!" First word: **SH'MA: LISTEN!** This is our first calling. We don't first seek our agenda, we don't determine our own path, we don't set our own course! We are not to "write our own story." We are to listen. What or who do we hear? **The Lord, your God.** God is not some vague force, some generic spiritual energy. Nor is God a distant supreme being. Neither of these can be Lord, because both can be set aside. No, God seizes us, and makes demand upon our obedience. Who is this Lord God? He is one—he is **Lord alone.** When we profess our belief in the one God as our singly and only Lord, this is our SH'MA, our most basic tenet of faith. We make in this world, with its many potential false Gods, a subversive statement, renouncing anyone else or anything else to be absolute—no country, no leader, no-thing demands our final and ultimate allegiance. Above all, we listen to God, who is our Lord ALONE.

What are the implications of such a radical and singular belief in the Lord God ALONE? In a certain sense, He can be the only one we love totally, the only one in whom we put our total trust. We are to love our Lord God with: **ALL OUR HEART**—the totality of our emotions and **desires; ALL OUR SOUL**—the **spiritual** aspect of ourselves; and **ALL OUR STRENGTH**—with all of our resources, with **all that we have.**

Our voting does matter. We are obliged to engage our culture and society, not to remain detached, but are to attempt to imbue our public square with the inspiration of the Gospel, to love others and defend the basic dignity of each person, from conception to natural death. But, when we see the imperfections of our government, its leaders, and our inability to perfect this world, we rest in the SH'MA of the scriptures: 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." We serve God by attempting to form our society upon the vision of Christ's Kingdom, where the least are cared for, the sick are healed, where injustice is banished. We want this kingdom to be more and more present with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength. The love of God impels us to work for a world where God's kingdom is more fully present, while at the same time we can rest, when human efforts fail, in the fact that the Lord God is Lord alone. All will ultimately be well because all is in the providential hands of a loving God.

Elections are important. Our leaders are influential in shaping our society. But they are not our saviors. We already have one on those! So, let's all take a deep breath, the deepest of breaths, and remember: The Lord our God is Lord alone! When this election, and the next one, and twenty after them have passed, the Lord will forever be the Lord alone. In today's gospel, Jesus himself confirms the ancient Jewish teaching of the SH'MA and approves it as the very center of the lives of his followers. As it turns out, then, I'm not the only one who approves this message.