

St. Louis Catholic Church

Friday of the 3rd Week of Lent

Hosea 14:2-10

Mark 12:28-34

Shema! The word means "hear". It introduces the prayer that Jews all over the world recite in the morning and in the evening, that they wear on their arms and forehead, that they post on their doors. It reinforces so many Lenten messages that we must listen, especially to the law that is life giving. "Which is the first of all the commandments?" asks the scribe. He is looking for an answer to understand and have an anchor for all laws.

The Shema is, "Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is Lord Alone". The Shema calls upon the faithful to love God without condition. Love with all since human weakness leads people to compromise in their allegiance to God. Everyone should strive for total commitment to God, which is the perfect expression of faith. This was Christ's answer and He volunteers a second example. This second commandment is the call to love one's neighbor as oneself. The scribe acknowledges that true service to God and neighbor is greater than any offering or sacrifice.

In the Old Testament reading Hosea speaks the word of God by telling the people to approach God and plead to be forgiven for their sins. Hosea had reconciled with his unfaithful wife and that can take place between God and His people. Simply they had stopped observing Shema and did not "hear" the call that our God is Lord alone. The Israelites heard, finally, and denounced the idolatry that had been so attractive. Earthly resources like the limited security from the foreign power Assyria was temporary. They came to hear and understand that anything of their own making, no matter how impressive, cannot match the glory of God. They confess, "we shall say no more 'our God' to the work of our hands".

God accepts their apology and man and God's relationship is restored. Beautiful imagery speaks of the transformation that will take place over the land. Flowers will be like the lily and tall trees like the Cedars of Lebanon. The people will again enjoy the benefits of olive tree and vineyard.

Jesus was asked to prioritize the Commandments. We know about the 10 Commandments (who can recite them in order?) (Family Quiz!) but there were 613 distinct commandments in the Law of Moses. There were great and not so great commandments.

Jesus brought beautifully the Commandments down to our level. He made it very brief and very succinct. Shema! "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, and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In Hosea's time the people abused, disregarded, violated and ignored God's Word. They placed self over God being first. Christ, God embracing humanity, lived totally loving God and neighbors. He sought the Father's will and plan, He was obedient. He trusted. His whole life was

a pouring out and emptying of self to the love of the Father. In that He saw all people, God's creatures, as worthy of the same expression of love. He mingled with sinners, He embraced the marginalized, He called people to a higher level of life and even died for them. Out of love. Out of love for the plan of the Father and out of love for man's condition.

He not only said love of God, neighbor and self was the first and greatest commandment. He lived it. Even on the cross He loved those who were crucifying Him. "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing".

It's hard to love. It's hard to make God first when so many other things lure us away. It's hard to see beyond the frailties of humans and to forgive the pain we have felt. But it is God's teaching and the first and greatest commandment--Love--a clean 4 letter word.

St. John the Beloved Apostle late in life used to preach very briefly to crowds. Sometimes all he would say is, "My children, love one another". (I know you wish that's all this John would say). Someone once said, "why do you always say the same thing?" John said, "Because it is the command of the Lord; if only this is done, it is enough".

Never tire of saying it, hearing it, or believing it. Think if love were the controlling force on this earth. Would we have as much war, riots, injustices? I know we are no match for the world. But charity begins at home. It begins with the people we live with and work with every day.

The Beatles sang "All You Need Is Love". Christ said and lived it long before--Shema. Hear O St. Louis Parish. The Lord our God is Lord alone--Love God--Love Neighbor--Love Self.

God Bless,
Msgr. John McArthur

Key Events This Week:

1. Friday Evening--Stations of the Cross--5:30 p.m.
2. Friday Evening--Fish Fry--Cafeteria--5:00-8:00 p.m.
3. Saturday--Men's Retreat for all Men--That's You--
8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.--St. Francis Church
Confessions--Great Speaker on Faith--
Mass with Bishop Steib
4. 40 Days for Life--Saturday 2:00-3:00 p.m.--All Invited
5. Sunday--Commitment Weekend--Bishop's Annual Appeal
--It's Our Church--
Every Family--Every Individual--Keep the Light Burning
Bring pledge card--After Homily/Video--All Come Forward
Goal \$439,000--You are needed
Goal 100% Participation--You are needed

Love God

Love Neighbor

Love Self

Love Our Church the Diocese of Memphis