

Readings: [Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

I like a good catchy phrase... those iconic sayings that seem to withstand the test of time...

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing...” Plato, quoting Socrates, 347 BC.

“To be, or not to be, that is the question...” William Shakespeare, 1604.

“I have a dream...” Martin Luther King Jr, 1963.

“That’s one small step for a man... one giant leap for mankind...” Neil Armstrong, 1969.

“Let’s make America Great Again...” Ronald Reagan, 1980.

“Hakuna Matata...” Timon, the Lion King, 1994.

They stick around and are passed down from generation to generation. A few weeks ago we spoke about the power of words of motivation and how the word of God itself a like a two-edge sword.

Today we return to this theme of the power of God’s word with what is one of the most important and powerful phrases in history, heard for the first time in Deuteronomy through Moses and passed down from generation to generation, and then uttered once again by Jesus in the gospel: Hear of Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.”

What is so significant about this phrase? What we have here is the move from polytheism, the belief that there are many Gods, to monotheism, the realization that there is only one God. This is not only something that would later end up shaping western civilization, but it has had important consequences in the social and moral life, then, and

today, because it was this phrase and this realization that there is only one God, that helped us humans come to understand what it means **love**, which we now understand as **faithfulness, commitment**. Without it, it is really difficult. How so?

One of the difficulties with having many gods and religions is the almost inevitability of war. By the time of Moses, recall how each region had its own god, and this led to each region constantly competing with the other to see whose god was more powerful, which resulted in constant war (refer back to my homily from a couple of months ago about the difference between God and religion, the homilies by the way are posted on the new website in both written and video format). Where there is war, there is violence, hate, indifference, racism and division among the human family. This also meant people never really got a chance to develop a deep sense of faithfulness and commitment, because there was always that desire to want to listen to and follow whichever god was the most powerful. If my god was suddenly weak, then my fidelity and commitment went out the window as I went with the next big great god, and if there is not sense of commitment and fidelity with the god I profess, then chances are it is difficult to be faithful and committed to those around me, because I too will be willing to betray my own family in the name of religion. In our faith we call this a disorder of the heart, sin, which harms not only the self but society.

So what God begins to do with this statement of faith is the beginning of a healing process, the movement of the human heart from disorder to order, and begins communication with the Hebrew culture through this statement: ***The Lord our God is Lord alone!***

(**Brief detour:** Have you ever wondered: why did God choose the ancient Hebrew culture and that time period for the beginning of God’s revelation? I think there are several reasons... Then the experience of slavery in Egypt served as a prime example of sin and disorder, and the Hebrew language itself is ideal when it comes to expressing divine concepts because words and their meaning are also expressed in how they are said. For example, take the command we are focusing on today: Hear o Israel, the Lord our God is Lord alone. In Hebrew it is: **שמע ישראל יהוה אחד** (Shema Israel, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad...) Let’s do a little language exercise, let’s take the first word, *shema*... which means *to listen* and say it together on three... one-two-three... Shema.

Ok, now let’s say it again, but this time, really slow, elongate that first half of the word. One-two-three- *sssshhhhhhhhemaaaaaaaaa*.... *shhhhhhhhhhhhh*... listen, hear oh Israel, *shhhhema*, listen, I want to speak to you, I want to let you know who I am... It draws you in. There are many other words like that too, like *ruah*, a very breathy word that also means the *spirit* of God, the breath of God, *ruah*. **Detour ended.**)

So this command to listen, to understand that there was only one Lord God, meant that there was no competition, no need to be fighting with other nations. And if there was only one God, then finally they could start developing a sense of true fidelity and commitment to this one God, and eventually to one another. It didn’t happen right away, it was a slow process of conversion of heart, but one of the results in their move towards faithfulness to one God was the emphasis the culture began to have on commandments, rules, and laws. They showed their

fidelity and commitment by enforcing them, a good step forward, but not enough because they now were more loving and faithful to law than people.

This brings us to Jesus, who came to complete this movement of the heart. By recalling the **shema**, Jesus is inviting us to listen once again, to listen to his message, to listen to his teachings we've been hearing through these Sundays, which all revolve around service: the commitment and fidelity to one another, which here he places at the same level of importance as the love of God.

To make that leap, he first had to open our eyes to who he was. That happened on the cross, where he showed the world just how committed and faithful God is to us, and there he took his last breath... *ruah*... for us. The breath of God that once brought order out disorder in creation, is now bringing order directly in our hearts. That is what we receive as baptized members of the Church, this *ruah*, this breath of God, meaning that all of us are involved directly in this continual process of God's love through commitment and fidelity, through love. It is only because of this breath in us, that we are able to follow the hard command to love God, neighbor, and ourselves.

If we love God, we love our neighbor and ourselves. When we love our neighbor and ourselves, we are loving God. Jesus gave us a radical new command that effects every relationship in our lives, so it is important to renew our commitments. If you feel like you have fallen short in being a good parent, friend, spouse, sibling, student, employee or employer, or stopped taking care of your own physical and mental health, then take a moment to **shema**, listen to our one Lord and renew

your commitments. Rekindle relationships, seek counseling if need be, take the next step towards a healthier lifestyle... let your faith in the One Lord bring order into your life whenever there is disorder.

Remember that the movement of heart is not just personal, it is also communal which we live out in a special way through our gathering for mass. If the pandemic made you lapse in your fidelity and commitment to coming to mass every Sunday, maybe it's time to recommit. While we still have the dispensation, word out there is that it will probably be lifted come the new year, so might as well get back on track.

I'll not pivot from homily, to just say a few brief words on stewardship. Stewardship is precisely that, it is one of the ways in which collectively we respond to the command to love each other with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That means with our deepest spiritual devotion, with our controlled passions, and with our gifts and abilities.

We do a fairly good job at it, but as mentioned in the letter you should have received by now, we are falling behind in part of our commitment of service to each other. You have all heard the call for volunteers for eucharistic ministers, for readers, for ushers... for weeks I said "shema, listen op holy spirit, we need you to step up." Apparently my **shema** is not very effective.

Do not deprive each other from what you have to offer. As we enter the next few weeks of our renewal of stewardship, begin there, begin with how you can be more committed to your parish family. If you are able to, decide to commit to a liturgical ministry for 6 months, or the whole year. Begin there.

Financially we are pretty committed, and for that I cannot thank you enough. So thank you for renewing your financial commitment to each other by filling out that renewal card and turning it in, grab one now and keep it with you, you'll notice the message on the back... Be sure to take it home with you.

Our goal is to get everyone to turn a card in by November 21st, just before the beginning of advent. The amount doesn't matter (okay, maybe it does a little), but what is most important the love, meaning commitment and fidelity, in which we respond. As you know, knowing with how much we are able to commit with our time, talent, and treasure is what helps us set goals, plan events, and know what is possible within our means. Thank you in advance for continuing to love each other, I look forward to non-stop smiles come December. "Let's keep father Carlos Smiling..." humm... I like that catchy phrase...

+ *Fr. Carlos*