

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

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

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28-34

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

Today's passage from Deuteronomy provides us with important background to our doctrinal focus on the Great Commandment of Jesus to love God and neighbor. This entire section is known by the first word of verse 4, "Hear" (Hebrew: *shema*). The liturgical and devotional use of the Shema have over the centuries made it one of the defining features of Judaism, from its recitation twice daily by every pious Jew to its inclusion in the phylacteries (small leather pouches) worn on one's garments.

The introduction given in vv. 2-3 is an exhortation typical of the Book of Deuteronomy, offering long life and blessing to those who heed the admonitions that follow. The subsequent verses (some would count only v. 4 or verses 4-5; others include vv. 4-9 in the Shema) capture the imperative of the first commandment, casting it in the larger context of covenant love which is itself responsive to the divine initiative ("the promise of the Lord..."). The words "heart...soul...strength" stress that love is inclusive of all of our human faculties. The love that is demanded here is no mere feeling; it is a way of life that entails obedience to the covenant and all its prescriptions, single-minded devotion to Yahweh, and enduring fidelity to the exclusive demands of Jewish monotheism.

In addition, as the rest of the Book of Deuteronomy shows so clearly, implicit in our love of God is a genuine compassion and care for others, especially the "little ones" beloved of Yahweh (see Deuteronomy 10:18; 15:7-18; 16:11; 24:17-18). Mark sets today's gospel pericope in the context of Jesus' teaching in the Temple. Of the nineteen references to



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scribes in Mark's gospel, this is the only one in which a scribe is cast in a positive light.

Consistent with a healthy desire to keep his religious tradition faithful to its roots, the scribe asks Jesus about the greatest of the commandments. Jesus links the Shema with the command to love one's neighbor, which is found in Leviticus 19:18. In so doing, Jesus is not taking an entirely original step. Other rabbis before him had done this. The agreement that is evident between the scribe and Jesus on this point is clear evidence that Jesus' response is consistent with Jewish thought of his day. Popular notions that cast Judaism in a negative light in this regard should take heed of the deeply spiritual sensitivity that lies at the core of the Old Testament tradition and that is revealed in this exchange.

Catholic Doctrine

Command to Love God and Neighbor

The injunction to love God and to love our neighbor identifies concisely the norm of life for followers of Jesus. Scripture is clear. First, we must love God. Only then does that love come to bear fruit in human loving. On the other hand, the believer cannot claim to love God without manifesting it in human relations. In the New Testament, the covenant love of God is seen as embodied and fulfilled in the life, teaching, and saving action of Jesus Christ. His self-sacrifice on our behalf, the paschal mystery, is understood as unlocking for us the font of grace from which we are born again as brothers and sisters of one another and witnesses to the world of the great love of God.

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