

Dear Parishioners

Many prayers are so well known to us we do not even have to think about them in order to say them. We pray the Lord's Prayer, for example, so often the words, beautiful as they are, barely even register in our brains. However, they do register in our souls.

In the first reading for this week, Deuteronomy 6:2-6 and the gospel, Mark 12:28b-34, we hear the words of an ancient prayer known as the Shemá: ***"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."*** The words of this prayer are attributed to Moses as he preaches to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. They were to keep the Shemá in a small box affixed to their wrists, and they were to recite it every day.

Jesus recited the Shemá and when the scribe asked him which is the first of the Commandments Jesus repeated it to him with a slight twist. He added "with all your mind" to the list of ways in which we are to love God. This is important because now we are to focus our intellect upon the commandment; we have to think about how we love God. Jesus also added the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves (which is also in the Torah). Of course the scribe knew these commandments very well, as well as we know the Lord's Prayer.

As Catholics and Christians we are not expected to wear the Shemá at all times. We hear this prayer in the liturgy of the word at least once every three years. However, the Shemá applies to our lives in a radical way simply because it is a call to love, that cannot be ignored.

Our world is troubled today by the forces of hatred, anger, doubt, and fear. We are a culture plagued by apathy, self-centeredness and greed. We have to remember, though, that we are Israel. Like the Israelites of Moses' day we are still awaiting entrance into the Promised Land of eternal life in the glory of God's kingdom. In this troublesome desert experience it is good for us to ponder these questions: What are some ways we can take to heart the commandment to love God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength? Do we love our neighbors as ourselves? How is it possible for us to take the

mere words of the Shemá so deeply into our hearts that we live them in every moment of our lives?

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel