

Fr. Rudy's Reflections
The Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 3, 2024

Hear, O Israel!

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus is approached by a Jewish scribe who asks him which commandment is the greatest. Jesus responds with the Shema: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!" (Mark 12:29), quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5. He then adds the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). The conversation is not merely a legal debate but an invitation to reflect on the heart of faith: to love God and neighbor with our whole being.

The opening word of the Shema, "Hear," reminds us of the primacy of listening in our relationship with God. In our modern world, we are often more inclined to assert our own opinions than to listen deeply—to others, to the world around us, and especially to God. The Shema begins with the call to listen because faith starts not with our speaking but with God's word. "Faith comes through hearing," St. Paul tells us. Yet, we often struggle to hear God's voice because our lives are filled with so much noise—both external and internal. We are bombarded by information, opinions, and distractions, all of which can drown out the gentle voice of God.

Listening to God requires silence and stillness. It demands that we step back from the rush of life and allow God to be in the foreground, not the background, of our lives. The problem is not that God is silent; it's that we are often not listening. God's voice is not a competitive voice, vying for attention like an advertisement or a headline. Rather, it is a quiet, persistent presence that can be heard in the beauty of creation, the kindness of a stranger, or the stillness of prayer. To hear this voice, we need to mute the constant clamor of our own thoughts and desires.

When we truly listen to God, we begin to see his presence shining through all things—the majesty of a sunset, the laughter of children, the resilience of those who suffer with hope. God is not a distant figure, but intimately involved in every aspect of life. By listening, we not only hear God's command to love but find the strength and guidance to live it out.

This call to listen extends beyond our relationship with God to our interactions with others. To love our neighbor as ourselves, we must first hear their stories, understand their struggles, and recognize their dignity. Listening is the first step in loving, as it helps us to see Christ in others and respond to their needs with compassion. As we reflect on Jesus's words this Sunday, let us ask ourselves: Are we truly listening? Do we make space in our busy lives to hear God's voice? And do we listen to those around us, so that we can love them as Jesus commands? "Hear, O Israel!" May we hear, and in hearing, may we truly love.

"In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself."—St. Teresa of Calcutta

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy