

Opening the Word: The dialogue



We are so used to the hostile encounters that Jesus has with authorities that we may overlook a remarkable moment from today's Gospel.

A scribe comes to Jesus, asking him which is the first or all commandments.

Jesus answers as any good son of Israel. He speaks back the Shema, the beloved prayer of the Jewish people.

The second commandment, flowing from the Shema, is the love of neighbor. As I have written in these columns, love of neighbor is intrinsic to the sacrificial prayer that Israel is to offer to the Lord.

To remember that God is one, that [he should be loved](#), is to [seek the flourishing](#) of one's neighbor. The widow. The orphan. The stranger.

Normally, after Jesus teaches, there is stunned silence.

Not this time.

The scribe speaks back. He, ironically, tells Jesus that he has spoken well.

[October 31 – Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time](#)

Dt 6:2-6
Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47,
51
Heb 7:23-28
Mk 12:28-34

The scribe repeats what Jesus has said, but he doesn't stop there. In reciting the Shema, the scribe says something more. To love God with all your heart, understanding, and strength, and to [love the neighbor](#) is "worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk 12:33).

Jesus sees that the scribe gets it. And he tells him that he is not far from the kingdom of God.

And only now, the stunned silence returns.

In this encounter with the scribe, the Christian receives a pattern to follow in the life of prayer and study alike.

We must first begin by [asking Our Lord to speak to us](#) through sacred Scripture and Tradition, what the Church calls the Word of God.

The posture we take up toward the Word of God should be akin to the wonder that the scribe shows. It is not a posture of mastery or control.

The voice of God longs to speak to us through holy writ.

And yet, Our Lord knows that conversation is two-fold. The scribe adds to what Jesus has said. What he speaks back is a deeper penetration into the words of Christ.

In both study and prayer, Our Lord allows us to possess a voice. We are not silent. What we receive, must be spoken back to God.

What a wondrous mystery! The God who emptied himself, taking upon himself human flesh and blood, wants to enter communion

with us. [God seeks this communion](#) with us in our identity as creatures who possess a voice.

God is not a tyrant, demanding that we bend a knee. God wants us to offer the return gift of ourselves, a gift expressed through our voice.

For this reason, the result of our prayer and study is not isolated from the grace of sanctification. Our contemplation of Our Lord's voice, our reception of this in our speech, is the precise way that we enter the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God penetrates more deeply into the lives of men and women through these occasions of prayer and study. The closer we come to the voice of God, letting our voices be shaped by that voice, the closer we come to the kingdom.

This leads us to the last dimension. Just like music, good dialogue flows from the fruitful silence between the notes.

There are times when we can say nothing more when the only appropriate response is to sit before the presence of Our Lord.

The [kingdom](#) is not marked by endless speech but by a silence of presence.

In heaven, no one will ask any more questions, not because the Communion of Saints is a space of stunned spectators.

Instead, we're too involved in wondrous praise.

"I love you, Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:2).

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