

*“Hear, O Israel,”* the great Shema, is a central expression of Israelite faith. The pious Jew recited it twice daily. Jesus grew up praying it. He drew upon it in His teaching. It gives expression to the absolute claim of the Lord’s sovereignty. The Shema is the centerpiece of Jesus’ teaching. It is recounted in today’s Gospel, to which Jesus adds the injunction “love of neighbor.”

The word “listen” means to allow the words to sink in, to provide understanding, and generate a response. Hearing and doing are basically the same thing—love the Lord your God, act in loyalty and faithfulness, keep the covenant relationship alive.

The Letter to the Hebrews brings this together in one new covenant sacrifice. Such love doesn’t ask for your “quality time;” it asks for your lifetime. It embraces all aspects of human conduct. Love of God, love of neighbor, is inseparable.

Yet to live tirelessly for God and neighbor is not easy. We live and move and have our being in the shadow of the Cross. Love’s obligations in the Shema are neatly distinguished:

- the *“heart”* is the seat of loyalty owed to God and neighbor;
- the pledge of the *“soul”* implies a willingness to give one’s life for God;
- by comparison, *“might”* or *“strength”* meant that one’s wealth and property were at God’s disposal;
- the *“mind”* is defined as a surrender of the will.

This love is not a matter of emotion or affection. The people of God dedicated their allegiance, their lives, and their resources to God—in a communal, binding oath. There exists a place between Church doctrine and our Rule: the realm of fraternal engagement.

Yet compromise is always with us. Compromise places God, and our Rule, in second place to something else. It dilutes the purity of love. Confrontation immediately puts conversation on guard. Naturally, our defenses go up.

Our Franciscan nature, on the other hand, opens us up to fraternal dialogue, and leads to mutual enrichment. Our tone of voice, our body language convey an attitude which sets the stage for good or ill. A “*gentle and courteous spirit*,” marked by respect, brings forth a ready response. The Great Commandment becomes flesh in daily fraternal exchange.

For us, we are to listen with an all-encompassing love. We stand with Jesus our Priest—and we approach God, with Jesus interceding on our behalf. Jesus is our sacrifice that makes us holy before God, together with Jesus.

How devotedly do we love God: with all our heart, soul, mind, resources, body, and strength that endures?

Do we love our neighbor, the opposition party, a friend, with the same passion? Jesus communicates to us His power to love. Then, we will hear Jesus tell us that we are not far from the Kingdom of God.

God desires our practical love—loyalty, self-surrender, loving service. The Beatitudes are qualities of life, behaviors. They become “the signs and signals” of the breaking-in of God’s reign in human hearts. They are the characteristics of the new order. They comprise how the Kingdom begins within each of us, and goes into the world—and is meant to change human hearts. Being and doing. Where have we heard that before?

As the Chapter began on Wednesday, I invited you: “*don’t go left; don’t go right; go deeper.*” We are living through perilous and polarizing times. We are experiencing a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership. Politics of division are undermining theology.

Be inspired by biblical faith. The Church’s role is not the master and servant of the state. The Church is Christocentric, bringing Christ back into the center of deliberations, actively discerning and engaging with one another. The government’s role is serving the common good by protecting justice and peace.

The prophet's role goes deeper into the moral values that a society needs to recover. The prophet generates hope, not a feeling, but *a decision*; not a mood, but *a choice*.

The prophet preserves what is good and shines a light on what is wrong. Prophetic creativity offers hope for both nurture and change—to see how things could and should be different and better.

Prophecy is never extinguished. It seeks the word of the Crucified One in a crucified people, those whom history still consigns to the margins. Pope Francis, in “Laudato Si,” has given us a method and a practice of seeing, while his “Fratelli Tutti” offers a “new vision” of solidarity for our post-modern world.

*Being and doing* becomes God's active presence in the world, sustaining and transforming societal life, rooting our communities in solidarity, equality, and human dignity.

Our commencement exercises begin with this Mass as our time of Chapter comes to an end. Now we commence with the work at hand. “For God so loved the world...”