

## Any More Questions?

Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Hebrews 9;11-14; Mark 12:28-34; Psalm 119:1-8 11-05-06

My oldest daughter went through a particularly long period of time asking me "Why?" about almost everything I would tell her, ask her, or explain to her. These were simple little questions such as, "Why is the sky blue?" "Why is water wet?" "Why does the grass tickle my toes?" This was a normal happening, I was told, at the time. First there was the "No" stage in the terrific twos and then, on the heels of that trying time, came the "Why?" stage that lasted at least through the third and fourth years of her life. Recently, when I spent some time with her and her husband and my grand-dogters, Daisy and Lily, I noticed that she still had the propensity to question "Why?" some thirty-four years after her first episode. Now, I have to think very fast when she starts shooting "Whys?" at me, and on occasion I respond with such a grand reason that she becomes silent. At that point I usually ask "Any more questions?" There aren't and peace descends.

Our scripture readings this morning give answers that don't lead to any further questions. They are delivered with the voices of authority and put an end to any "why, when, where, how or what" responses.

Moses lays down the basis of all law for the nation Israel. There were many laws, more than 600 by which an observant Jew would abide. But the essence of the law resided in those words in Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might." Monotheism and devotion are rolled up into those few words. They were to be recited and talked about, posted on doorposts and worn on foreheads. And they were and they are.

Wikipedia tells us, "This prayer is known as the 'Shema' *Shema Yisrael* (or *Sh'ma Yisroel* or just *Shema*). They are the first words of a section of the Torah (Hebrew Bible) that is used as a centerpiece of all morning and evening Jewish prayer services and closely echoes the monotheistic message of Judaism. It is considered the most important prayer in Judaism, and its twice-daily recitation is a *mitzvah* (religious commandment). Its main content is loving the one God with all one's heart, soul and might, and the rewards that come with this." This is a matter of fact in Judaism, no questions allowed.

We see the same authority in the reading from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus took the base of Judaism, his faith, and added to the Shema, a second commandment. Along with loving the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The scribe that asked which commandment was the first of all went away satisfied—there could be no further questions. Jesus spoke with authority, his words had and have a ring of truth.

When that truth is truly heard by people and lived, life and lives change. If you do not believe it, try it.

These commandments, not suggestions, put God and neighbors first. They do not exalt the importance of the one who is to practice these commandments. Others come first. This is tough for us to grasp much less practice. And that is because we are human. But, in our humanness we have been give free will, the gift of choice. We can decide if we will listen to the words of our faith tradition and strive to engrave them upon our hearts and within our souls and to contemplate them in our wonderful God-given minds. We can question them, but there is not much farther we can go in our

questioning. These commandments are simply the base upon which all other things we do, say and think should rest. As Jesus said, these are the two commandments that supercede all others.

Of course, we often try to dance around the second of these two, wondering just who is our neighbor. If you have listened to enough sermons and meditations you know that everyone is considered a neighbor. No one is left out. In our rapidly contracting world in which we encounter people of many different nationalities and faith systems, and life styles we need to bear this in mind. And we need to practice loving those we are in contact with as much as we love and cherish ourselves.

Why? Why not. What can it cost us? We are here to do God's work on earth. We are here not only to reflect the love God has for us to others but to see that others also have God deep within them no matter what the outside covering might be. No matter who we are or where we are in life, we all are the beloved children of God.

This is the base of our faith, it is the base of the faith Jesus lived and loved and handed down to us. In it we find the answer to any more questions. Amen