

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
Ex 22:20-26
Ps 18 *passim*
1Thess 1:5c-10
Mt 22:34-40

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St. Petronille Parish, Glen Ellyn
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Catholics of my generation learned our religion using the Baltimore Catechism. The Baltimore Catechism set forth the truths of the Catholic faith in a question-and-answer format. Our job was to memorize answers. Some of those answers became practically hard-wired into us. One example: *A sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace.* If I'm recalling correctly, Question number 1 was: *Who made you?* The correct answer was: *God made me.* Question number 2: *Why did God make you?* Answer number 2: *God made me to know him, love him, and serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next.* Although very few of us appreciated our catechism lessons at the time, they gave us a deep foundation to build a mature, adult faith on.

God created us, each and every one of us, with a mission and a destiny. The mission? To know, love, and serve God in this world. The destiny? To be happy with God forever in the next world. The human race was originally created with the capacity for that sort of happiness. We lost that capacity when our earliest ancestors decided that we didn't need God anymore, that we would rather go it alone. But, as the Gospel of John tells us, John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."

You see, the human person is one of the mysteries of creation. We are built in many layers, like concentric circles, and every time we figure something out about ourselves, we find a new layer. If we could successfully peel away all the layers, at the very center we would find . . . an emptiness, a hole. It's a hole that only God can fill; it's as if it was exactly in the shape of God. Originally God filled the God-shaped hole at the center of every human person. That was when all creation was at harmony and peace. But when our earliest ancestors decided to take over, to stop letting God be God, we pushed God out of the God-shaped hole. In place of God we crammed a whole bunch of stuff, but nothing fits in the God-shaped hole except God, and God has to be invited back in.

On Mount Sinai God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. A wise man once said that really what we have is one commandment followed by nine footnotes. That one is the first commandment: "I am the LORD thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me." When you see the phrase "the LORD" in the Old Testament, the word "LORD" is usually written in small capital letters. That's a signal indicating that the editors have substituted "LORD" (in small caps) for the sacred name that God had previously revealed to Moses, the name Yahweh, a Hebrew word meaning "I am who I am" or just "I am." With that in mind, we can see that the First Commandment is actually saying, "I am Yahweh

your God, and I'm all the God you need." The other nine commandments, what the wise man called the footnotes, are just ways of checking if we're really letting God be God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reaches deep into what God revealed to the Jews, to tell us that the lessons of the Bible can be distilled down to two great commandments: first, to love God with every fiber of our being, and second, to love our neighbor – not as some *other*, hostile and alien, but as *another self*.

Four centuries after the time of Jesus, a great bishop named Augustine distilled it down even further. St. Augustine said, "Love God and do what you want." Right away we glom onto the "Do what you want" part, but Augustine said **first** to love God. If we truly love God, then we will always want to do the right thing.

St. Augustine is also remembered for a prayer that touches on the same theme: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." That restlessness, that lack of peace, is a sign that we are not loving God with every fiber of our being, that we are not letting God be God, that we have jammed something else, something other than God into the God-shaped hole at the center of our being.

How do we access the God-shaped hole? God in his mercy has given us a way. It is called adoration. Adoration is one of the forms of prayer – others being contrition, thanksgiving, lamentation, and supplication. The word adoration is from the Latin word *adoratio*, a compound word composed of "*ad*" and "*oratio*." The *ad* part means toward. The root of *oratio*, the second part, is the Latin word for mouth, from which we get English words like oral and oratory. Adoration puts us in intimate contact with God.

Adoration is not difficult: you don't have to memorize any words; you don't have to set aside any particular place; there are no special prayer postures or tools. All it takes is the effort to place oneself consciously into the presence of God, to quiet one's mind and heart, and to listen to what God says.

Try it. Try it today. Try it every day this week. Find a spot where you can be alone with God. Turn off the music. Turn off the devices – the cellphone, the iPod, the radio, the TV. Slow down your breathing and pay attention to it. If you need a word to focus on, use the name of Jesus – the first syllable when you inhale and the second when you exhale. Breathe in God's love and breathe out God's praise. The Holy Spirit will guide your thoughts and speak to you through your thoughts. Start with 5 minutes and slowly work up to whatever amount of time works for you.

"My name is Yahweh," God says in the first Commandment. "I want to be your God and I'm all the God you need." God wants to fill the God-shaped hole at the center of your being. All you have to do is invite him in.