

Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 4, 2018  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

I once saw a movie called "Yentl". In this movie, the character played by Barbara Streisand wants to become a rabbi. The trouble is, she's not a man, so she's not allowed. She dresses up like a boy to attend the school, and takes part in the furious debates. Naturally, she meets a fellow. They argue about the law, scripture, the commentaries. Their love of God drives them to understand him, and on the way they discover the love they have for each other: friendship; even attraction - however confusing; sacrifice for the other's greatest good.

That image of the debates lets me picture the scene in today's Gospel: "One of the scribes came near and heard the religious authorities disputing with one another." He asks Jesus, "Which commandment is first of all?" Jesus responds with words from the *Shema*, the daily declaration of faith. We heard it in the first reading of Deuteronomy: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." But Jesus adds something: the words "and with all your mind."

Our minds stretch out to apprehend all that exists, and all that can exist. They reach beyond the emotions of the heart, which rise and fall like a beating pulse. The field of the mind is broader than the will of the soul, which strives to choose at each moment how best to love God and neighbour.

Dt 6:2-6  
Ps 18  
Heb 7:23-28  
Mk 12:28-34

A mind can see a mountain or a molecule; things too big or too small for even the strongest person to wield.

How can we love God with all our mind? With our reason, we can recognize God as the supreme good, and the source of all good. He loved us first. We hear this and accept it. Then we respond with faith and love, for him and for his creatures.

More specifically, we're called to form our conscience. According to the catechism, "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed (1778)." Put more simply, it's the voice within us that reads the law which God has inscribed upon our hearts (1776). It tells us what is good and evil. It's a messenger from God.

However, the conscience does need to be formed. Otherwise it's lead astray by negative influences (the devil, the world, the flesh). Otherwise it is tempted by sin. The seven deadly sins, the capital vices, the cardinal sins: they all begin as thoughts that bully the conscience; shouting it down and pushing it aside. Pride leads to the hatred of God, denying his goodness, cursing him as the one who punishes and forbids. Sloth refuses the joy that he brings. Indifference ignores the love that he shows. Ingratitude withholds love for love (2094).

All of these are thoughts that confuse what conscience is called to say.

The formation of conscience is the work of the Holy Spirit, and we cooperate with that work. He speaks through the Church which brings us truth. We receive this truth in the sacraments, which charge it with grace. The truth that forms our conscience is found within the Word of God, it's heard within our prayer, and is witnessed by our neighbour. The truth lights our path from the wood of the Cross.

The formation of conscience is the work of the Holy Spirit, but it's also our lifelong task. The higher our education, the more we should learn about the faith. Learning the truth helps us know what to do. Education in virtue prevents fear and pride, bringing freedom and peace of heart. And questions are OK, but they do require boldness on our part: as disciples, as children and parents too.

Today's Gospel ends with these words: "After that no one dared to ask Jesus any questions." I don't think he took that as a compliment, like someone at a debate who made his point and left the others speechless. "After that no one dared to ask Jesus any questions." I think it broke his heart. He had the answers to our biggest questions; he had words of eternal life (Jn 6:68). In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says that "The Holy Spirit ~~also~~ grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition (259)." The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to ask questions, since Jesus tells us to love God "with all your mind."

Let your questions move your trust to curiosity, let them push you to seek, because they come from the Holy Spirit. "We need the Spirit's prompting, lest we be paralyzed by fear and excessive caution, lest we grow used to keeping within safe bounds (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 133)." Ask your questions, because the answers bring friendship and attraction, sacrifice and love.