

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Aug 23rd 2013

There are things that evoke an identity, such as the national anthem or the colors of the national flag. Israel's national identity was, at its core, a religious identity clearly evoked in the Shemá Israel –hear, O Israel [Dt. 6:4-5] quoted by Jesus, himself a Jew, in today's gospel reading. A devout Jew would recite the Shemá upon rising in the morning and quite likely before retiring at night. It remains today an identity quite engraved in the heart of a devout Jewish person.

The Shemá is truly a call to wholeheartedness –with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind– and as such it should also be engraved in our own hearts. God's call, which is also a call to prioritize our loves, is never a call to mediocrity.

Yes, there is in God's calling a diversity that corresponds to the diversity of persons, indeed to the uniqueness of each person. Unfortunately this diversity of callings/vocations is at times misread as a diversity in the expected degree of wholeheartedness in the response, as if priests/brothers/ sisters were called to a wholehearted response, while the rest of the baptized were called to “muddle through” as best they can.

Baptism is the seed of a calling that will develop as the person grows up and to the extent that such a calling is owned and embraced –not automatically. As through prayerful reflection on our lives we recognize both our giftedness and how it fits in our life context, we try to see in that the path the Lord is inviting us to follow, precisely in order to love your neighbor as yourself, the second commandment the Lord says is like it (like the Shemá). Then our response, which we already desire to be wholehearted, becomes concretized in marriage, priesthood, religious life, medicine, law, nursing, teaching... The difference among vocations lies not on the side of the expected response, but on the side of the diverse calling we are expected to respond to wholeheartedly.

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