

Homily for Friday of the 3rd Week of Lent
 Hosea 14:2–10
 Psalm 81:6c–11b, 14, 17
 Mark 12:28–34

Augustine wrote:

He Who hath created thee without thee, will not justify thee without thee”

Here St Augustine is referring not only to our physical creation but even more to our spiritual creation. It is a creation that is brought about by him. But what does it then mean to say

“that God will not justify thee without thee.”

Dietrich Von Hildebrand in his seminal work: “Transformation in Christ” said the following by way of explanation:

The true Christian, though mindful of the fact that left to himself he would fall again and again, also knows that in Baptism he has received from Christ a supernatural principle of holy life, and that through God’s grace he shall—and can—become a new man. He knows that God wills his cooperation in this process of transformation.

It is this process of transformation that Jesus addresses in today’s Gospel.

This is the most famous of all Jesus’ saying. He begins by quoting the most famous saying in Judaism, the great Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. (Hebrew for “hear”):

Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone!

By the time of Jesus, this statement was understood to mean that YHWH is not only the one God of the Jews but the one and only God of the whole universe. In a world of polytheism, the Jews were the only people to have been granted this earth-shattering insight: there is but one God, who has created all things and who holds all things in existence by his goodness and power. His claim on us is therefore total, calling for a total response at every level of our being. To love God is to have a profound reverence and affection for him, to give ourselves over to him and desire to please him above all else.

Jesus uses four terms that articulate how we are to love God totally.

The heart (kardia) is the inner depths of a person, the wellspring from which all our decisions and actions flow. We could call the heart our conscience.

The soul was created by God at the point of our conception and the soul is what will live on after our mortal bodies die. It is the soul that will be united to our resurrected bodies after the Second Coming.

Jesus adds another term, mind, to emphasize that even our thoughts and reasoning must be animated by love for God.

The last phrase, with all your strength, emphasizes that love for God is not a sentiment that arises spontaneously, but a commitment that calls for every ounce of our energy. How can such love without measure be possible? Only by our first knowing and experiencing God's love for us.

Listen again to how this love is poetically expressed by Hosea:

*I am like an evergreen cypress;
your faithfulness comes from me.*

Our love for God flows from our knowing his eternal love for us.

The second part of Jesus' response quotes Lev 19:18: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus is the first one known to have explicitly combined these two commandments. But they are the foundations underlying the first three and last seven commandments of the Decalogue respectively. His implication is that they are inseparable: our love for God is concretized and expressed in our love for fellow human beings. To love others "as yourself" means to make their well-being as high a priority as your own, a very demanding standard.

Writing in the 7th Century the Venerable Bede said of the Lord's teaching here in Mark:

"Neither of these two kinds of love is expressed with full maturity without the other, because God cannot be loved apart from our neighbor, nor our neighbor apart from God. Hence as many times as Peter was asked by our Lord if he loved him, and attested his love, the Lord added at the end of each inquiry, 'Feed my sheep,' or 'feed my lambs' (John 21:15–17), as if he were clearly saying: 'There is only one adequate confirmation of whole-hearted love of God—laboring steadily for the needy in your midst, exercising continuing care of them.'¹

Let us keep the Shema of Jesus in mind as we apply St Augustine's insight to our lives this day:

He Who hath created thee without thee, will not justify thee without thee"

¹ Healy, M. (2008). *The Gospel of Mark* (p. 247). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

