

**Reflection on the Gospel-30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A  
(Matthew 22:34-40)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Until fairly recently, the Jewishness of Jesus was often downplayed, even ignored. Today's gospel passage has Jesus affirming the most central of Jewish traditions, namely the command of Deuteronomy 6 known as the *Shema* (so called from the first word in the statement meaning "hear"). The words of the *Shema* are recited repeatedly every day by every faithful Jew. Although not a prayer in itself, the *Shema* is an integral part of Jewish liturgy and prayer. It is a creedal statement that continues to function like an overture to Jewish life and practice. The doorpost at the entrance to a Jewish home generally features a tiny rectangular box known as a *mezuzah*. It contains a scroll bearing the text of the *Shema*. Those who enter touch the *mezuzah* with the greatest reverence. When I first encountered this practice, I was deeply affected by the power of the symbol to link one with the deep story of a people, in this case with that of the Jewish people.

In Matthew's story, Jesus the Jew provides an honest response to the less than honest questioning of an expert in Jewish law. He overlooks the hostility of the lawyer and the Sadducees with whom the lawyer has aligned himself. He evokes the text of the *Shema*. Jesus thus invites the lawyer to return to the heart of their shared tradition. He links the teaching of the *Shema* on wholehearted love of God with a second commandment taken from Leviticus 19: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". The lawyer's unfair "testing" of Jesus is evidence that this is precisely what he fails to do: he addresses Jesus as teacher, a term of respect, and yet fails to show him the respect due to him as neighbour.

For Jesus, the whole of the Torah and the teaching of the prophets can be summed up in the commandments to love God with all of one's being-heart, soul and mind, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Not just love, but *intensity of love* is the issue here. One is to love with the whole of one's being. One is to care for others as one cares for oneself. We see such intensity of love in those who are giving their lives to save those infected with Covid-19. Front-line health workers are three times more likely to contract the infection than others and yet few hesitate to turn up day after day to be there for their patients. Amnesty International estimates that some seven thousand health professionals have already lost their lives to the virus. The witness of their commitment functions like the *mezuzah* in our lives: it draws us back into the heart of the gospel tradition and calls us to a deeper, more intense love. It also helps us to deal with the insincerity of those who seek to score points and undermine the dignity of others.