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“You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34).

2 Tim 2:8-15; Mark 12:28-34

Lovers of poetry and great writing know the power of words to lift readers and listeners to a transcendent place. My father could recite long passages from Shakespeare’s plays, memorized, we later found out, while in high school detention. Fifty years later, he brought them forth like treasures and performed them with dramatic flair to encourage us to behave in school.

The story is told of St. Dominic saying “*Fortiter! Fortiter!*” to the friars when they prayed the Psalms in choir. “Strongly, strongly, brothers,” as the spirit and pace of their call and response soared. We witness this joy in today’s Gospel as Jesus and the scribe recite the *Sh’ma*, the basic prayer all Jews recite daily to attune their minds, hearts, spirits and strength to God.

The exchange may have begun as a test from the learned scribe to Jesus, a hill country preacher, to see if he knew the first and greatest command of the Law. But when Jesus answered with the *Sh’ma*, “Hear O Israel,” the encounter became a fervent call and response as both Jesus and the scribe recited the complete prayer. The scribe even added that the love of God and neighbor “is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Jesus commended him with an invitation to come even closer than the Law and more intimately than just words, by surrendering himself to God’s love, saying to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

In this time after Pentecost, we might wonder just how we can experience the Holy Spirit. Saying the *Sh’ma* daily might be a start. To say it with great *fortiter* is to enter the Jewish world that formed Jesus and to grasp the joy a whole people

celebrate by reverencing, praying, memorizing and reciting the commandment to love.

Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

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