

**Reflection on the Gospel-30th 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 credal statement that still functions 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 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 the book of 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 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. We see such intensity of love in the lives of people like Dr Catherine Hamlin and the late Dr Reg Hamlin whose fistula hospital in Addis Ababa has, since 1959, restored health and dignity to the most marginalised of women. I see it in the heroism of my own friends who pour out their lives for the sake of those in communities remote from the centres of power, in Timor Leste and elsewhere. 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.