

**HOMILY**  
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A few years ago a radio station ran a contest. Disc jockeys invited their listeners to tune in their clock radios to their station. “Just for fun,” they said, “when you wake up to the sound of FM-106, call and tell us the first words you spoke when you rolled out of bed. If you’re the third caller, you’ll win \$106.”

It didn’t take long for the contest to grow in enthusiasm. The first morning, a bubbly disc jockey said, “Caller number three, what did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?” A groggy voice said, “Do I smell coffee burning?” Another day, a sleepy clerical worker said, “Oh, no, I’m late for work.” Somebody else said her first words were, “Honey, did I put out the dog last night?” A muffled curse was immediately heard in the background and then a man was heard to say, “No, you didn’t.”

One morning, however, the third caller said something unusual. The station phone rang. “Good morning, this is FM-106. You’re on the air. What did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?” A voice with a Bronx accent replied, “You want to know my first words in the morning?” The bubbly DJ said, “Yes, sir! Tell us what you said.” The Bronx voice responded, “Shema, Israel. Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” There was a moment of embarrassed silence. Then the radio announcer said, “Sorry, wrong number,” and cut to a commercial.

Try to remember. What did you say when you rolled out of bed today? Chances are those words set the tone for the rest of the day. For the pious Jew, the first words of each morning are always the same. (And they were the words spoken that morning on FM-106.) They were first spoken by Moses, who said, “Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Teach them to your children and talk to them when you lie down and when you rise.”

And so the Law teaches: You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul. In Hebrew thought, the soul is the breath of life, the part of us that is the breathing part. To love God with the soul is to love God with every breath. We breathe because God has breathed life into us.

Back in the Fourth Century, some Christian monks visualized this insight in a memorable way. They talked about prayer as a breathing exercise. “As you inhale,” they taught, “thank God for the gifts which are given you for today. As you exhale, tell God how you are going to use those gifts.” For example, breathe in and say, “I thank you, God, for daily bread.” Breathe out and say, “God, let me find strength in daily bread.” Breathe in and pray, “I thank you, Lord, for the forgiveness of my sins.” Breathe out and pray, “I ask you, Lord, to make me a forgiving person.” Breathe in; breathe out. The monks said, “Let every breath be a prayer.”

The commandment goes on to say, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind.” We have heads to think, ideas to develop, and thoughts to express. When we wake each day, we are called upon to love the Lord with all our minds.

You shall love the Lord with your entire mind. If the only mental stimulation we receive comes from *People Magazine* or some tabloid, then we do not have the capacity to know how deeply God loves us. If we’re trying to handle adult life with a third grade catechism education, we will not have the skills needed to negotiate daily difficulties. The answer? There are a lot of answers. Go to an Adult Education class in our church, visit the Parish Library that has almost 3,000 volumes, take out a book that stretches your brain and fires up your imagination, check out the four-week session on the *Infancy Narratives* just in time for Christmas. To that end, we are called to love God with our mind. And, to go back to the beginning, what should we say when we roll out of bed? What words should we put on our lips?

*Lord, let me love you with all my heart,  
with all my soul,  
with all my mind,  
and with all my strength.  
Let me love my neighbor as myself.*

If these words were good enough for Jesus, they should be great for you and me.