

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

REFLECTION 1: THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that the greatest and first commandment is to love God. The second commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself. These two commandments are the foundation of our faith, so Jesus concludes that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

There's a story told about a famous Jewish teacher Hillel. A gentile taunted him to teach the entire Torah in the time it took him to stand on one foot. Hillel responded: 'that which is hateful to you do not do to your brother or sister. That is the whole Torah; the rest is explanation; go and learn. Love of others is a constant for anyone who enters a relationship with Yahweh/God.'

It's clear from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount that Jesus expects us to love even our enemies and when Luke's Jesus discusses the Great Commandment, he immediately follows his teaching with the parable of the Good Samaritan, demonstrating that even the hated Samaritan was neighbour to the Jew mugged along the Jericho road – there's no limit to who is my neighbour.

There's an important aspect to loving one's neighbour as oneself. 'As much as' is another way of saying 'equals'. Jesus is subtly saying that the more you love your neighbour, the more you're loving yourself – a fulfilled life revolves constantly around those whose lives we share.

In the words of the song, 'the greatest thing you'll ever learn is to love and be loved in return'. We are more and more aware that the Christian Gospel is a proclamation of ultimate unfailing love. But there are three dimensions – the first is by allowing us to be loved and to take seriously the astounding love of God. It can take us a while to make it our own. The second, our practical love of others is always a challenge. As Fr. McVerry once said, 'the good news is that God loves you, but the bad news is that he loves everyone else just as much!' But the third dimension may prove even more challenging – we are invited not only to be loved by God and to love our neighbour, 'with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind.' Perhaps the greatest thing we will ever learn is to be loved by God and to love God in return.