LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

25th October 2026

Matt. 22:34 When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, [35] and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. [36]" Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" [37] 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.' [38] This is the greatest and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' [40] On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is certainly not the most obscure passage in the Bible—the task lies elsewhere, that is, in living it. However a few remarks may keep us open to the challenge.

This brief exchange is found in all three synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:28-31 and Luke 10:25-28). In reality, it is also found in the Fourth Gospel with its extraordinary emphasis on love—love from God, love for God and love for our brothers and sisters.

As we have seen before, these vignettes from the life of Jesus are best understood as *chreiai*, scenes which illustrate the "needful" or what is necessary. It is in the form of questions and answers.

Thought for the day

Jesus does not pluck his summary teaching from the air—he quotes from the *Shema Yisrael,* the great daily prayer of Judaism found in Deuteronomy 6. The second part about the love of neighbour is taken from Leviticus 18. This mission statement stands as a resounding appeal to us today. We are asked not just to believe that there is a God, but to love God. We are asked not just to respect our neighbour, but to love our neighbour. Love is not only the truth about human beings but also the truth about God, who is love itself.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

The Jews could count 613 commandments that had to be observed in order to be in full compliance with the Law. So it is not surprising that the question came up in rabbinical circles about which was the most important; which commandment is the greatest?

When Jesus was asked the question he didn't have to think twice. He answered with the words that Jewish men repeated at the beginning and end of every day: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts, and with all your soul and with all your might." He had recited these words that morning. They helped him to centre his life on God. This was the most important thing for him.

Then he added something that no one had asked him. "A second is like it: "you shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is nothing more important than these two commandments. For Jesus they cannot be separated. One cannot love God and turn away from one's neighbour, Loving God simply means centering our life on him, living to do God's will.

That is why Jesus adds the second commandment. One cannot love God and neglect the people who suffer, whom God loves so much. There is no 'sacred space' where we can commune alone with God, away from other people. Any love of God that leaves out God's sons and daughters is a great lie.

Some people have rightly summarised the religion of Jesus as "passion for God and compassion for human beings."

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - The Way Opened up by Jesus

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. You may feel some sympathy with the Jews struggling to cope with 613 laws and wondering which were the important ones. Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the rules and regulations of your own tradition? And have you ever been blessed by meeting someone, or reading something, that was able to cut through all the layers and point out to you what is essential in life? Who was that person? What did s/he say or do? Is there some phrase or text that encapsulates such wisdom for you?
2. If you were asked what is most important in life, what would your answer be? Recall the experiences and relationships you have had. Which are the ones that you treasure most? What has particularly enriched your life? How would you encourage another person who asked you how s/he could live a full life?
3. In the unusual circumstances of this year, we may need to find unusual and creative ways of showing love to our neighbours. What ways of reaching out to others have you found are most appreciated?

John Byrne OSA - Intercom

Today's passage is built around a saying of Jesus. It is a wisdom saying which the passage invites us to enter into with our feelings. Its truth should touch us so deeply that we are filled with gratitude, and also with humility as we realise that we do not live up to it – as individuals, as a Church and as communities. The saying then becomes a call to repentance.
It is a teaching on wholeness: the wholeness which comes from recognising right priorities among our various obligations – "which is the greatest of the commandments".

Wholeness is presented in the form of a journey – we become whole by moving from fragmentation to wholeness. This is a crucial message for our times since fragmentation is one of the characteristics of our modern Western culture and the journey to wholeness one of its greatest challenges. Wholeness therefore defines our Christian mission today. Our special contribution to the modern world is to help ourselves and one another make the journey to wholeness – and this gospel passage shows us how this is achieved.

As always we read Jesus 'saying, not merely as theory, but as testimony also. This was how he looked on life at this crucial stage of his journey, when he was in Jerusalem, facing the wrath of "the chief priests and elders", arrest and crucifixion. A good approach to interpreting the passage is to start with Jesus – what was in his mind when he said this? So too a sign that we have made a good meditation is that we celebrate Jesus (and all the people like him) who have touched our lives.

In our meditation we must make sure to interpret "love" concretely. In our culture it has become vague – meaning many things and therefore nothing very precise. We need then to give it some "body" – meaning such things as "surrender ourselves to", "put our trust in", "choose to please".
"All your heart, all your soul, all your mind": we do not have to give each of these a separate meaning. A cumulative effect is intended " –your whole self".

Scripture Prayer

Lord, we thank you for the great teachers who have touched our lives,
they were not learned like the Pharisees,
nor high class like the Sadducees,
but they taught us the basic lessons of life,
and ever since we have been able to put laws and prophets into proper perspective.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

In his reply to the Pharisees, Jesus quickly gets to the heart of the matter by reminding them of what they already know. The God they serve is a God of love so they must love God and their neighbour. These two sides of their life of faith cannot be separated and in fact they sum up the entire biblical story.

REFLECTION

Knowing the right answer does not always mean that we will do the right thing and today's gospel shows how true this is. It is relatively easy to talk about religion and even to feel very passionate about it. However, that is no guarantee that we will be living the kind of life that God wants from us. Loving God means loving your neighbour. Not just the deserving neighbour or the helpful neighbour or the Christian neighbour. God is presenting himself to us in many disguises and in our hurry to go to Mass we could be ignoring him in lots of different ways.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

God is love and dwells within each person: this is our true self. This bring the question, can we cope with this? Are we able to open our hearts in awareness to this love, to tap into this divine indwelling? Then we can truly love our neighbour as ourselves - not *as much* as ourselves, but as a complete continuation of our very being. Thomas Keating once said, "We're all like localised vibrations of the infinite goodness of God's presence. So love is our very nature. Love is our first, middle and last name."

How do we put on the mind of Christ? How do we see through his eyes? How do we feel though his heart? How do we learn to respond to the world with that same wholeness and healing love? That's what Christia orthodoxy is all about. It's not about right belief; it's about right practice. (Cynthia Bourgeault)

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper