

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
THIRTYFIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)
4TH NOVEMBER 2012

During the week before I preach I go walking over some hills praying to try and discern what I should say, so when I was looking at this weeks readings I thought to myself this is good, it's all about love. However, near the end of what I have to say I suspect you'll realise that what I felt called to say caused me some anxiety. Anyway, our readings are about love, so do you all know God loves you? I don't mean in a cosy warm feeling sort of way, but in a mind shattering bang in the heart way.

God, creator, loves you! It's a real delight to tell people "God loves you". Oh, and by the way, he wants you to tell others this as well....

This brings me to a question. Why are we here today? Children, you may have come because mum or dad said you have to or out of respect for them. Adults, you may have come because you want some company, or because it's a rule of the Church, or maybe because in your heart you know it's what God wants. We heard the Scribe in the Gospel agree with Jesus' answer just how much more important love is than rules and sacrifices. Deep within us, I suggest that for all of us here it is a response to the pull of God's love that ultimately brings us together.

In the Gospel we hear one of the Scribes (children, that's one of the teachers of Jewish Law) ask Jesus a question. Now, most of us struggle to name the 10 commandments, but the Jews had over 600 laws! Anyway, this Scribe wanted to know which among these 600 or so laws was the most important, and fortunately for us Jesus reduces the number right down, but note he gives 2 answers, not a single one as he had been asked. Have you ever asked yourself why he replied with 2 answers?

Well, it's because all those 600+ laws, just like the 10 commandments, can be condensed into the law of love. This love has 2 components, a vertical one and a horizontal one; i.e. the love between us and God, and the love between people. (A little thought for those of you who are awake to ponder – Jesus, in his very person, is God and man. So, man loves God and is loved by him....and then through the Holy Spirit, God enables man to love man....)

And so Jesus says love God with everything. Not part of us but everything we have. Is this written on our hearts, as Moses advises? Jesus is looking for a greater commitment than just knowing the rules. If we emigrate, we may know the requirements to become a citizen of that country but choose not to fulfil them. Similarly, we know what God asks of us to be citizens of heaven, yet we may not actually decide to become one. Our choice . . .

It's time to wake up, so I'm going to make this personal. You'll have to adapt this a little to fit your own circumstances but here are a few questions in response to Jesus' answer to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

First part, four questions.

Question 1 – do I love God with all my heart? Well, do I love God more than I love Sarita, my wife? Do we have any loves that get in the way of our love for God? ...Is God first in our heart?

Question 2 – do I love God with all my soul? Do I pray do I meditate? Yes, I can pray on the go, and that's good....but do we want to be like the Scribe to whom Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God", or do we want to be properly part of it? We must at times stop our activities to spend time with God.

Question 3 – do I love God with all my mind? Do I devote my intelligence to help me know God? When I look at nature do I try to see how God is involved in the beauty and order of things? Or do I just go through each day unthinkingly?

Question 4 – Do I love God with all my strength? Do I persevere in trying to know God; do I ask God to deepen my faith? Or is God kept in a corner for Sundays?

Second part of Jesus answer is about loving our neighbour. Now, in ancient Jewish texts it was already an offence against God even to be indifferent to your neighbour, so Jesus was building on existing principles. He tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is not just because that would be good for society, it goes much deeper. How can we love a God we haven't seen unless we love those made in his image and likeness. So, we must love each other and people who live near us or work with us.

During my training a wise priest said that whenever we preach we must not lose sight of the fact that the primary aim is to point people towards Jesus. You may recall a few months ago I showed a picture of a tramp and asked who you saw. And then I asked you to look at the person near you and see Jesus in them. So please, just for a moment look at the person next to you or near you, and know that Jesus is in them and they are your neighbour.

For those of you who have snoozed through my homily please for a moment pay attention. We often hear the Gospel and think "that's a good idea" but then do nothing. We can choose to keep our faith to ourselves but that would be going against Jesus' teaching. I'm coming to the part I said caused me anxiety. Today I ask you to do two things which could help you love your neighbour. I ask you to do something in response to Jesus command, not just hear his words. I shall do the same.

God wants to stretch us away from any complacency we have. So, first and easiest. Please turn to a person near you – and even move a few feet if necessary... you only need 20 seconds for this – ask them what it is they wanted someone to pray about... promise that you will pray about this.

Secondly, today or tomorrow, ask a friend, a colleague or one of your neighbours if there is something you can do for them or something they would like you to pray about for them. And tell them the reason you are doing this is simply because you love them as a friend or neighbour.

Then, if a conversation starts, who knows, God may give you the courage to say that you're doing this because Jesus has asked you to.

Let's not just listen to Jesus and then forget what he said, let's do it. Respond to Jesus command in to love God and let's love our neighbour; it's good for them and it's good for us.

Rev Dr Jonathan de Kretser

References Deut 6.2-6; Psalm 17.2-4, 47, 51; Heb 7.23-28; Mark 12.28-34