

SUNDAY 30 (A) (2020)

A) INTRODUCTION

- Yet again the Pharisees are out to get Jesus
- Last week, He got the better of them over whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not
- This time they try to trap him with a question about which is the greatest commandment
- According to the Rabbis there were no fewer than 613 commandments, and they would not all be of equal importance
- the idea of the question was to get Jesus to commit himself on a much-debated topic
- In that way it would surely be possible for the crowds to be divided about him, some agreeing and others disagreeing.
- In his reply, Jesus avoids the question:
- He identifies as the greatest commandment what really is not a commandment at all, but rather the "soul" of all the commandments: our love for God.

B) THE SHEMA

- It is our love for God which inspires all the commandments
- If we really do love God then we will want to keep all the commandments
- And so Jesus quotes from the Old Testament prayer called the Shema
- This is a prayer which pious Jews recite morning and evening, even to this day
- You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind

C) LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

- but Jesus does not stop there
- he goes on to make this rather abstract commandment very concrete and practical by quoting from another old Testament text:
- you shall love your neighbour as yourself
- Jesus says that this second commandment resembles the first
- What is new is the fact that he not only brings the two commandments together
- But that he gives each of them equal weight and equal importance
- You can't have one without the other
- And he goes on to say that on these two commandments hang all the laws of the Old Testament and all the preaching of the prophets
- In other words, the whole of God's revelation up till then.

D) BUT WHAT DOES LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR MEAN?

- in answer to that question, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan
- but today's First Reading from Exodus gives us some idea of what it meant to the Jews of the Old Testament
- you must not molest the stranger or oppress him
- you must not be harsh with the widow or the orphan
- you must not play the usurer with the man who is very poor
- these are ways in which people related to the most vulnerable and least protected in any society
- for the Jews, the stranger was any refugee, exile or foreigner
- anyone in an alien country in which one has no civil rights
- they are reminded that they too were once strangers in a foreign land
- God had treated them with love and care: they must do the same

E) AND FOR OURSELVES?

- for us too, loving one's neighbour can begin with a practical concern for people around us who are vulnerable, weak, unprotected
- but we must be careful not to be too choosy about who our neighbour is
- what can make this commandment difficult is that we are sometimes called upon to show love for people we don't like very much, or whom we find difficult to get on with, family members, work colleagues, people in the neighbourhood
- it might help to remember that we are not commanded to like people, but to love them, to want their ultimate good
- for me there are two or three great incentives or prompts to trying to love another person, even when they are difficult, and these prompts come from Jesus' own words
- he said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you;
- whatever you did to the least of these brothers or sisters of mine you did to me
- and at the Last Supper he said: Love one another as I have loved you
- not easy