

“Which is the great commandment in the Law?”

May I speak in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There have been a series of important events in my life that have shaped and formed my worldview in a way that requires me to think about reference them in my conversations. Although this is not a formal discussion but please indulge me if you may.

Here, I am simply referring to my Confirmation in the year 2004, not because it was particularly the most memorable year, but because it relates strongly and sacramentally to my growth as a Catholic Christian. The third question in the Catechism, according to the Book of Common Prayer, thankfully did some expository work on this Gospel.

“What did your Godfathers and Godmothers do for you then?” (p.289)

You are at this point responding to something that was promised on your behalf but with which you are now ready to embrace publicly by saying;

“They did promise and vow three things in my name. First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that I should believe all the articles of the Christian faith. And thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life”. The emphasis here is to keep his commandment and walk in it as long as we breathe.

The ninth Catechism puts it more clearly in case you're still carried away by the excitement of G&T and Tea, saying(p.292), "What is thy duty towards God?" Here is the response:

"My duty towards God is to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength".

Similarly, the answer to the next question about our duty towards our neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me".

Love is one of those topics in the light of modern arguments and controversial debates wherein dissenting voices, often among conservatives, Christians or not, are often accused of lacking love; thus, they are hateful of progressive ideas. But, anybody can love, anybody can hate. Both are mutual phenomena that can be found among all people.

However, true love can only be found in God. God is love. To love God with the whole heart, according to Cyril of Alexandria, is the cause of every other good. 'Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind'. This statement is in itself containing something very poignant yet necessary for us to know, since it is the greatest commandment. The others, even the least among them, are inferior to it.

For Origen, "worthy is he, confirmed in all his gifts, who exults in the wisdom of God, having a heart full of the love of God, and a soul completely enlightened by the lamp of knowledge and a mind filled with the word of God". It follows then that all such gifts truly come from God. The

entirety of the law and the prophets is based on and aligned with the principle of loving the Lord your God and one's neighbour, and it is through love that the essence of piety is realised.

The first commandment instructs on all forms of piety. Loving God wholeheartedly is the foundation of all goodness. The second commandment encompasses the virtuous deeds we perform for others. The first commandment paves the way for the second and is, in turn, reinforced by it. A person rooted in God's love naturally extends that love to his neighbour in his actions. The individual who adheres to these two commandments experiences the fulfilment of all commandments, i.e., one who lives a sober and righteous life anchored in the principle of economy of Christ. The similarity between the two is great; it is precisely the intersection that often results in great comfort.

Love often tests our patience, our witness and our discipleship. I believe strongly that temptations are a key foundation to our faith in God, for it is only through trying times that our faith is tested and through it it is built on that solid rock which is Christ. Recall that in the Gospel reading, the question about the greatest commandment didn't come from just a random person, it came from a lawyer, a learned man, someone who commands great authority in law and Torah. In the Gospel of Luke, he is mentioned six times because it means the same as scribe, one learned in Torah. They wanted to do something which they could nail him with. And one who is vast in the law had to put him to a test because Pharisaic overdevelopment of minor laws threatened a grasp of the essentials, "you shall love" but Jesus seized that opportunity to educate them, to go deeper into the mystery of our being. The love which he stresses is not primarily a nostalgic feeling like I do with my Confirmation, but a

covenant fidelity, a matter of willing and doing — “with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul”. Jesus perceives the law as a cohesive entity; from God's law, all other laws can be derived and upheld. What he tried to do is to place, at the heart of who we are, the conscious reawakening of the body and mind to that ultimate reality that can only connect us to God and, by extension, to humanity. A shift from the Torah to the deeds of love. He was careful to note quite strongly that upon this hang all, ALL THE LAW AND PROPHETS.

God's goodness is encapsulated in his special sign that we love him.

St Francis de Sales rightly attributed, “it is wonderful enough if he permits us to love him; for a few brave spirits might avail themselves of due permission”. I consider that to be wonderful imagery! The love of God holds out two hands to catch and take us: one is the commandment that we should love, the other is the act of his own love in the sacrifice of Jesus.

To love our neighbour as ourselves does not mean that we get to decide what such love means; rather, to love well is constituted by practices such as those outlined in Matthew 18:15-20. To learn to love our neighbours as ourselves means we must learn to love ourselves as God has loved us, this is different from loving ourselves in our own terms. The challenge posed by Jesus in uniting these commandments is to understand that one is loved by God, enabling one to love both God and others in return. This form of love necessitates a lifelong process of training, during which we are permitted to uncover and overcome our self-centred tendencies.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us. On these two commandments hang all the laws and prophets.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.