



Matthew 22:34-40

34 When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together 35 and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, 36 ‘Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?’ 37 Jesus said, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. 40 On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.’

Other readings: Exodus 22:20-26 Psalm 17 (18) 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Jesus’ discussions with the religious leaders in Jerusalem continue in this gospel passage. The question about the law is asked according to this evangelist in order to ‘disconcert’ Jesus. The reply is Jesus’ own summary of what the law of God requires, and it has become accepted as a brief expression of the whole moral law. His reply leaves them without anything to say.

If we return to the ancient expression of the law of God in the Ten Commandments we find no explicit reference to love of God and love of neighbour. Jesus draws together all the commandments under these two headings. What does Jesus mean by love? Love of God is our grateful response to the love shown by God throughout the history of salvation.

Love of neighbour is illustrated in our first reading, from the book of Exodus, with its explicit instructions from the law about caring for those in need, the stranger, the widow, the orphan. Our actions must be guided by concern for the real good of others, and an awareness of their needs.

We may notice that Jesus does not refer to the love he himself shows. It is not until the Gospel of John, with its profound reflection on the actions of Jesus, that we hear Jesus saying: ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ (John 13:34) It is in his self-giving death on the cross that his love comes to a climax. This supreme act of love is the model for the love Christians must show. The love shown by the Son of God in going to his death, which is present for us in the Eucharist, draws us into deeper love, for God and for neighbour.

St Paul continues in the first letter to the Thessalonians to praise their Christian witness. Their lives, which have been renewed by faith, have drawn others to the gospel. ‘The news of your faith in God has spread everywhere!’ writes Paul. They now live in expectation of the return of the risen Christ.

Do I attempt to follow Christ’s commands of love in my daily life?

Do I endeavour to imitate in some way the self-giving love of Christ?

We thank God for the new law of love.

We pray for all Christians whose example gives us encouragement.