

Homily. 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. A. 4/5 November 2023.

Last weekend we listened to Jesus Great Commandment, his law of love of God and neighbour which fulfils all of the laws and teachings of God. Talking about this here at that time I said that it's God who loves us first and foremost; that God really likes us, finding us likeable and that despite everything that happens we remain good at our core, keeping our birthright as God's own very good creation. When we say 'yes' to God's love for us, accepting God's love-gift into our hearts and souls, it's only natural then for us to love God in return, showing this through our loving service and care for others, especially people in crisis or acute need. This is how we live out the two parts of the one Great Commandment.

On Wednesday we celebrated the life and witness of all of the Saints who in diverse ways and times found their path to live the law of love. We appealed for their ongoing help so that we might find our way to imitate the holiness of their lives. Then, on Thursday night, we called to mind and prayed for all of the souls who have gone before us, commending them and their journey home to the merciful, healing and holy love of God.

All of this has many practical implications for us and the gospel highlights one of them; that love of God and caring serving love of others requires us to discern what is true from what is false. Pointing out the disconnect between the right teaching and words of the Pharisees and their selfish, self-enriching actions Jesus says 'Do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do since they do not practice what they teach and preach'. Loving both God and other people demands that we draw daily on the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit

so as to discern between those with integrity and care of heart and those whose heart is self-serving and set only on manipulation of others.

This is the hard part in living out the Great Commandment, what we call 'tough loving', the kind of loving that isn't gullible and wasteful, being instead wise, honest and effective in its purpose and power. Discerned loving such as this reflects our own integrity, shaped as it is by God's holiness and wholeness. It lifts burdens from others rather than laying them heavily on their shoulders. At times this means unflinchingly facing, unmasking and challenging those whose selfish interests masquerade as loving service, calling them to a change of heart and action.

In this holy loving work Jesus is both our guide and model. He gave his love away to the last drop of his life-blood. He served all who needed his care and attention and he faced powerful hypocrisy with confident faith and courageous fortitude. His gift is continuously renewed here in our Eucharist, becoming the source and strength for our own efforts to put into practice the Great Commandment. For such a living power at work among us still we all give thanks to God who is our hope and our peace.