

## Homily: 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

This week in the Gospel we again see the opponents of Jesus come to try to trip Him up. The question is a fair enough one: “What is the greatest commandment of the law?” But there were so many commandments – famously, 613 in total – that it was hard to pick out what was most important. The Lord replies by pointing out the two commandments which are not only most important, but which include all others: Love God with all your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbour as yourself. At the same time, Jesus shows just how poorly the Pharisees live this commandment: before them they see Him, He who is both God and their neighbour – and they have no love for Him at all.

We shouldn't be surprised that our Lord points to love as the first and greatest commandment. After all, it is the only thing which gives life meaning – so it must be at the heart of how we are called to live. Think of songs you know, and see how many of them are about love – almost all of them, probably. See if you can find a book or a film that doesn't include love somewhere, whether that be between lovers, families or friends. Life is about love – and love is what gives meaning to life.

It might seem strange, then, that the greatest act of love ever performed – the greatest proof of God's love for us – was the Lord's death. We know that Jesus died on the cross because He loves us, each of us, more than we can understand. By doing so, He saved us, and He proved to us that He loves us with a love which never fails and cannot be earned: it is all His gift.

But in the cross we don't just see the proof of God's love for us – we see also something of the real meaning of love. Jesus teaches us to love God not just with all our heart, but with all our mind and our soul – in other words, love is not just a surging of emotion to someone we find attractive or beautiful in some way. Love involves the whole person, and – in a certain way – every act of love is a moment of death.

That might seem like an odd thing to say. But when we think about it, every time I do something purely out of love, I die to myself. I die to myself because I do something which says, “I put you before me – in this moment, I put your needs first – I consider you to be more important than me.” So my ego dies a little. Love always involves sacrifice, as any parent knows very well; and sacrifice is always a kind of dying to ourselves because it puts our own ego aside to consider another person. And there's another sense in which we die to ourselves when we love, because when I love someone, I know that I need them. To love means to need – the fact that we love shows us that we are not self-sufficient; we can't survive on our own. So our ego, our pride, our self, dies a little bit.

But of course, that's not the end of the story. Death leads to resurrection. We think about Jesus' death on the cross as the great act of love, and that's true; but perhaps we don't notice that the resurrection is also an act of love. Jesus did not rise from the dead only for His own benefit: He rose from the dead so that we too might live. By dying He destroyed our death; by rising He restored our life. In His resurrection, He opens the path to heaven for us; He makes it possible for us to be with Him, in perfect love, for ever. The sacrifice of the cross led to the joy of the resurrection, the joy of union with the Lord, offered to all.

In the same way, when we make sacrifices out of love, we die to ourselves but rise to a new life. We experience the joy of giving – just yesterday I heard a doctor on the television saying that studies have shown that giving to others improves our mental health. And not only that, but by giving, by making sacrifices, we are made more free to live a life in which we're not enslaved to our own desires.

The great commandments of loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and loving our neighbour as ourselves – these may seem beyond us: too hard to live! But each time we do the smallest act of love for God or another – it could be pausing for a moment of prayer, doing some tiny act of penance, cleaning up after someone who's left a mess around the house, picking up the phone to someone who's a bit lonely... each time we do something like this, however small, we enter in a very small way into the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. We follow His path of love. We die a little to ourselves and rise to the life of greater love for which we are created.

Fr Andrew

