

Cruciform Love

Homily for October 28th and 29th 2023
30th Sunday Ordinary Time

You will notice in today's Gospel from Matthew that a lawyer asks for Jesus to highlight which of the commandments in the Law is the greatest. Now what does St Matthew mean when he mentions a lawyer? Not what we would usually mean, a barrister who with the judiciary interprets and applies the laws of Canada. The kind of lawyer referenced here was an expert in the Law of God – what is known as the Torah. The legal experts of Judaism had identified 613 laws contained within the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. So this lawyer asks of Jesus – of the 613 laws, which is the greatest?

Notice what Jesus does. He shows that the greatest commandment is not one law but two. The first is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 4. This is called the “Shema”, Hebrew for “Hear” In Deuteronomy it is stated this way:

Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is One Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.

When Jesus takes this commandment he changes it slightly:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment.”

Notice Jesus exchanges “might” for “mind”. I was pondering why is this? I would answer it this way. Now that God has taken on our human life and has spoken definitively to us in Jesus, we can incorporate our mind more fully in loving God because the word was made flesh. We can now ponder the words of God incarnate. St Paul in Romans chapter 12 says something very similar. Having spent 11 chapters talking about the Life of Jesus he then teaches us:

Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.^[d]

The next thing Jesus does is move from Deuteronomy to Leviticus 19:18 and quotes these words:

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

What Jesus is teaching us is that love is cruciform, it takes the shape of the Cross. In this cross you will notice a Bishop who is at the centre of the Cross. This suggests that through the Church—represented by the bishops, we are guided to learn how to love God, ourselves and our neighbour. The vertical dimension of the Cross pulls us upwards towards God, and the horizontal dimension directs us out towards the world. At the centre is the relationship with have with ourselves.

Notice as well how the two greatest commandments summarize the Ten Commandments. The first table directing us towards God, the fourth commandment directing us toward being formed in the family to love ourselves; and commandments 5-10 directing us out towards the world, in love of neighbour.

All of the 613 Commandments are to therefore conform us to the Love of God that is Trinitarian.

When teaching children to make the sign of the Cross I will say that our Father in Heaven loves us so much that Jesus, His Son was sent into the world and our hearts and by the power of the Holy Spirit his love was poured out on the whole world.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to grow into this Cross-shaped love.

Notice now how the other readings for today further affirm the teaching of Jesus. Our psalm verses celebrate the greatest commandment, love for God. Let me highlight just a few of them.

“I love you, O Lord my strength..... I shall call on the Lord who is worthy to be praised. The Lord lives, blessed be my rock... and shows steadfast love to his anointed”

We are God’s anointed ones because through our baptism and confirmation we have received the anointing oils as represented here by Pope Francis. The physical anointing points to the deeper spiritual anointing by the Holy Spirit.

If you look over to the right hand side of the Church, these oils along with the oil for the anointing of the sick are always present in the Church.

Then in the reading from Exodus, we have a passage that comes shortly after the 10 Commandments and affirms the importance of love for the neighbour who is most vulnerable. This is called the Book of the Covenant (the Book of Promises). Here we have mentioned the foreigner, the widow and orphan and the homeless poor. Within the teaching of the Church we are called to exercise of corporal works of mercy, which is the fleshing out of Exodus 22. These works are:

1. Feed the Hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Shelter the homeless
4. Clothe the naked
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit the imprisoned
7. Bury the dead.

Do you see how the Lord in his teaching has left us with such a beautiful and comprehensive way to love the Lord, ourselves and neighbour?

Now see how this finds expression in our reading from St Paul. When the early Christian community in the Greek town of Thessalonica heard the Gospel and witnessed its power through

St Paul they experienced conversion. They received the word with joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit. As a result they so exemplified cruciform love that other early Christian communities heard about their faith practiced with fervour and love. St Paul says they turned from false gods - that is the worship of idols - to the living and true God.

We are to be the community that in the present is exercising this threefold love because we follow in the way of Jesus. We put these loves into practice. This is why the Church exists. But in order for this ministry of love to be realized money is required. St Paul in 2nd Corinthians devoted two chapters (8-9) to the importance of financial support for the ministry of cruciform love. Please listen to these words:

The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.¹

Money is like the seed that is used that allows for a bountiful crop, or to change the metaphor it is the fuel that allows for this love to burn brightly and warmly. Without the adequate fuel there will not be the fire. This brings me to the application of today's teaching.

We are in a position at St Peter's where we have significant fuel shortage.

As of October 20th we have 1043 identifiable givers. Our total budget for 2023 is \$1,254,802. To reach our goal we need to raise \$330,432 in the next ten weeks. This is \$33,043 per week.

To date we have received \$924,370. This averages \$886 per donor.

Together in Action:

Goal \$74,863

Given to date: \$57,998.

Remaining to reach goal \$16,864

\$16 per donor

Building Fund

Goal: \$269,940

Given to date: \$142,637

Remaining to reach goal: \$127,303

\$122 per donor

Operations:

Goal: \$910,00

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#) (2 Co 9:6–7). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

Given to date: \$723,735
Remaining to reach goal: \$186,265
\$179 per donor.

Average amount needed from 1043 givers: \$317.

I would like to ask you to prayerfully consider contributing to St Peter's finances in such a way that we can meet all expenses and so continue to further the work of Jesus at St. Peter's. There may be some listening to me today, who can give at a higher rate than I have outlined hear. Please do so, if you can. There may be others for who this will be a stretch for you financially. Please give as you are able.

You can do this online or via cheque.

May we have all the fuel needed for the fire of love so at St. Peter's we can grow ever more this love that is cross shaped.

Let us pray: Jesus thank you for your distilling all of the Commandments of the Torah to these two. We look to your example to inspire us to follow your generous love so that we may be cheerful givers. May each of us be guided by the Holy Spirit to give lovingly and generously to fuel the fire love and so meet our budgetary goals. Most of all may we express the warmth and light of the love that is cruciform.

Amen.