

At first, reading our Gospel for this Sunday is one of those passages of Scripture which, upon hearing it, we instinctively think “oh yeah heard this one, know it, got it.” The Scribe asks Jesus, “What is the greatest commandment?” Love God with all your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbour as yourself. We got it, makes sense. God asks us to be loving people.

Now in the Jewish tradition the rabbis, the teachers, the scholars, as they hashed over the scriptures would, on one hand, explain and interpret the word of God, with great verbosity, with volumes of text. But, other times they would try to reduce things to succinct statements. So the scribe, in addressing Jesus, is asking for one of those succinct teachings, the sound bite. And scholars say that our Lord was unique in bringing these two pieces together. In isolation what he says is not new. But the combination is. What is the greatest commandment in the law? Part one, Love God – part two love your neighbour as yourself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets. But of course, we read this and think “no big deal”. But is it a big deal? But what are we hearing when Jesus says this?

As one author put it, “Jesus did not say that the greatest commandment was to believe in God and love humanity. He did not say that we should be nice to one another because that’s the way God would like us to behave. He said the first and most essential thing is to love God with a paramount love.” And maybe that is what we are not hearing. Is there more to Jesus’ words than just being a good neighbour?

Like the love of neighbour, the love of God has to manifest itself in some way, in some action. And how do we manifest this love of God. Worship, adoration, devotion, prayer. But what purpose do these things have? What good is there in coming to Church today? To hear the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist? What good is it to kneel in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament? What good are my prayers? We have all heard it, “I don’t need to go to church, I don’t need to believe in God to be a good person. However, are these things somehow linked to love of neighbour?

The love of God, the worship of should pull us out of ourselves, challenge our self-absorption. Worship should challenge our self-assuredness. Coming before God should help me say I am wrong, my thoughts are wrong, my feelings are wrong. I am not-aligned with God; I’m in error; I’m a sinner. The worship of God allows us to admit the reality of evil. We have to co-operate with God’s grace in order to conquer the malevolent forces which act against all that is good, true and beautiful. That work against the power of love.

Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. Before we say, got it, heard it before, know it. Stop and ask ourselves, “Do I really have it?” Do I really understand, do I really give God the love that is at the heart of this command?