

In today's Gospel reading, we find another discussion between Jesus and his opponents, this time the Pharisees. It centres on which of the commandments is the greatest.

Matthew agrees with Mark that love of God and love of neighbour constitute the chief and basic commandment; that this is, in a way, a summary of the entire Torah. But Matthew goes further: he puts these two commandments on an equal footing, and presents them as supporting the rest. He uses the verb "hang" to express the idea of these two being the ropes which hold up the rest. His reply is perfectly orthodox, and Jewish Christians would be able to defend themselves on this basis.

Matthew shows that permeating religious practice must be love: love of God and our fellow human beings, and that both are equally important. In a sense, this is his version of the Golden Rule. ■

REFLECT

Matthew the evangelist is usually understood as being a tax collector, called by Jesus to leave his profession and become one of Jesus' disciples. This traditional view has been expressed in art down the centuries. It may well be the historical fact, but it is unlikely that someone from such a background could have produced such a scholarly work, which we know as the Gospel according to Matthew: it betrays too deep a knowledge of the Jewish scriptures. There is another possibility about his identity, that he was, in fact, a convert Jewish scribe, "who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old" (Matthew 13:52 may offer this description of the author of the Gospel).

To Jewish converts, the place of the Law, which they had regarded as their way of responding to the Lord's covenant with Israel, must have been a question of the highest importance. By the time Matthew is writing, the Temple has been destroyed, the political influence of the Jewish people in the land has disappeared, and the Law has provided the core of their sense of identity. Does this have to be, at best, abandoned, or, at worst, repudiated because they have accepted Jesus and his message? The answer of the earliest disciples seems to have been "No", as they continued to frequent the Temple. Although there was eventually an official excommunication of Jewish Christians from the synagogue, it is likely that Jewish traditions continued to influence communities such as Matthew's. The lesson that love of God and neighbour should be the force which informs all the outward observing of our own traditions today, that there is no essential conflict between law and love, is as valid today as it was when Matthew wrote his Gospel. ■

SAY

The greatest commandment is to love God and my neighbour.

LEARN

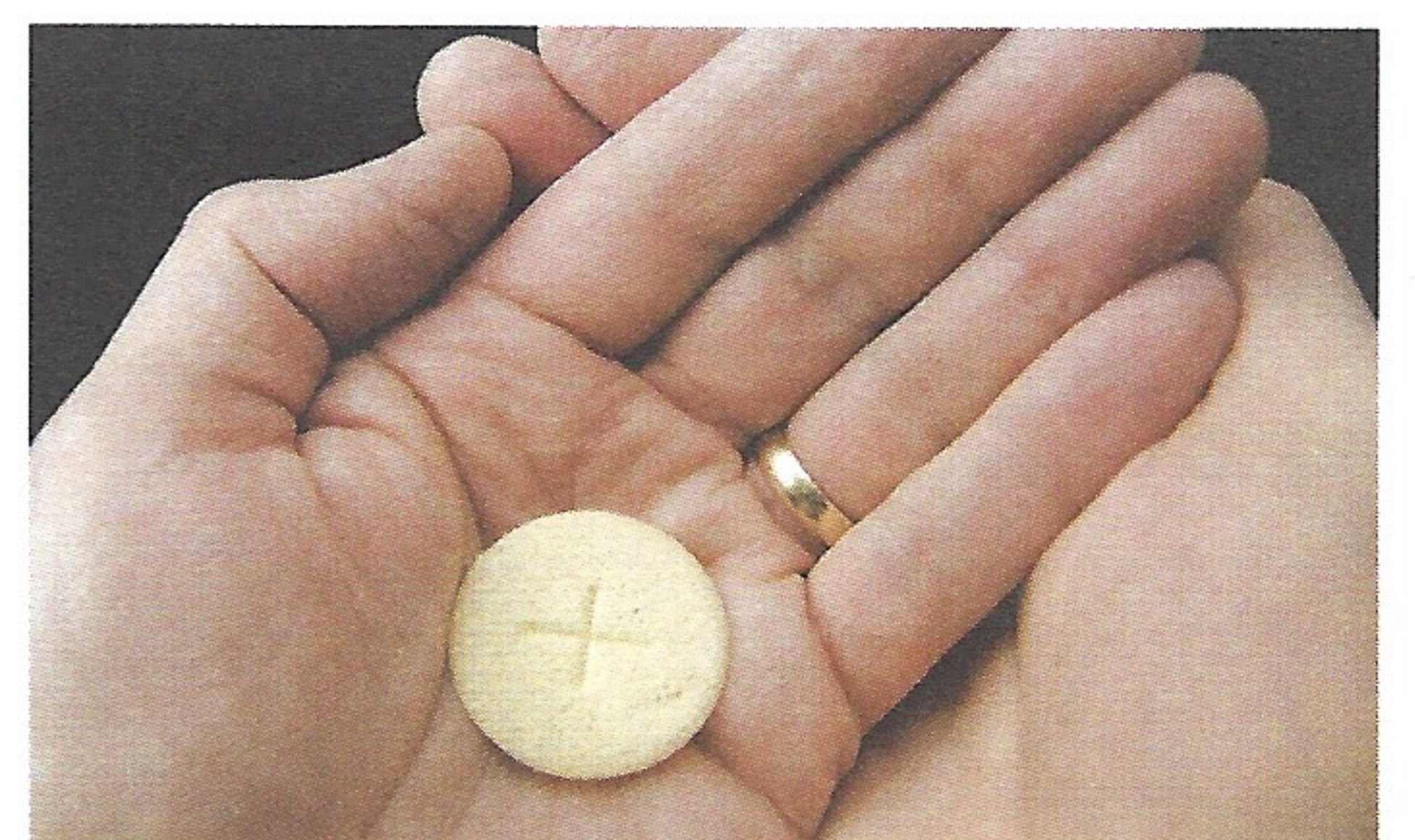
The rabbis calculated 613 commandments in the Torah: 248 positive and 365 negative.

After the destruction of the Temple and the end of animal sacrifice, observing the Law took on even greater significance in Jewish life than before.

Not all the commandments were of equal weight: some were classified as "heavy" (more important), others as "light" (less so).

DO

Reflect that when you come to celebrate the Eucharist, you are supporting your fellow parishioners as well as expressing your commitment to the Lord.



ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice;
turn to the Lord and his strength;
constantly seek his face.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
increase our faith, hope and charity,
and make us love what you command,
so that we may merit what you promise.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Exodus 22:20-26

A reading from the book of Exodus.

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the sons of Israel this, 'You must not molest the stranger or oppress him, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. You must not be harsh with the widow, or with the orphan; if you are harsh with them, they will surely cry out to me, and be sure I shall hear their cry: my anger will flare and I shall kill you with the sword, your own wives will be widows, your own children orphans.

'If you lend money to any of my people, to any poor man among you, you must not play the usurer with him: you must not demand interest from him.

'If you take another's cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him before sunset. It is all the covering he has; it is the cloak he wraps his body in; what else would he sleep in? If he cries to me, I will listen, for I am full of pity.'"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 17

Response:

I love you, Lord, my strength.

- I love you, Lord, my strength,
my rock, my fortress, my saviour.
My God is the rock where I take refuge;
my shield, my mighty help, my
stronghold.

The Lord is worthy of all praise:
when I call I am saved from my foes. (R.)

- Long life to the Lord, my rock!
Praised be the God who saves me.
He has given great victories to his king
and shown his love for his anointed. (R.)

SECOND READING 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians.

You observed the sort of life we lived when we were with you, which was for your instruction, and you were led to become imitators of us, and of the Lord; and it was with the joy of the Holy Spirit that you took to the gospel, in spite of the great opposition all round you. This has made you the great example to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia since it was from you that the word of the Lord started to spread – and not only throughout Macedonia and Achaia, for the news of your faith in God has spread everywhere. We do not need to tell other people about it: other people tell us how we started the work among you, how you broke with idolatry when you were converted to God and became servants of the real, living God; and how you are now waiting for Jesus, his Son, whom he raised from the dead, to come from heaven to save us from the retribution which is coming.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Open our heart, O Lord,
to accept the words of your Son.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 22:34-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

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

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Look, we pray, O Lord,
on the offerings we make to your majesty,
that whatever is done by us in your service
may be directed above all to your glory.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

We will ring out our joy at your saving help
and exult in the name of our God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May your Sacraments, O Lord, we pray,
perfect in us what lies within them,
that what we now celebrate in signs
we may one day possess in truth.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

G.K. Chesterton

