

'Which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' We hear today that a Pharisee addressed this question to Jesus in order to 'disconcert him' (Matthew 22:35). Jesus replied by joining together two commandments, to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18).

Sometimes as Christians we can tell ourselves a story that the Law of Moses was all about obscure and difficult rules about what to eat and what to wear, and that Jesus came to do away with all this and simply told us to love God and one another. This is at best a caricature and we need to think about this matter a lot more carefully.

The First Reading (Exodus 22:20-26) which gives us some of the commandments of the Law shows us that the Law was a very practical matter laying down how the community are to relate to one another, with a special concern for strangers, the poor, widows, and orphans. Much of what we now know as 'the social teaching of the church' actually derives from the Law of Moses, which Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfil, and people rightly speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition of compassion and justice.

One of the ways in which Jesus fulfilled the Law was to teach us that every other person on earth is our neighbour. Last week I spoke about the new encyclical letter of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, and how it draws extensively on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). You may remember the occasion on which Jesus told this parable. Jesus was asked by a lawyer, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life', Jesus responded by asking him what was written in the law, and the lawyer responds by quoting the two commandments from Deuteronomy and Leviticus which speak of the love of God and the love of neighbour. Jesus praises him for his answer, and then the lawyer, to justify himself, asks the further question 'and who is my neighbour' which is of course the prompt to the parable.

The question of 'care for our neighbour' has been in the news this week not least with the discussion around the provision of food to families with children during school holidays. It is a good opportunity to take stock of some of the initiatives we do already support as a parish with perhaps the invitation to those who feel they can do more to do so. Even during the months of the lockdown we continued to receive donations of food and forwarded them on to a local foodbank. All those donations were gratefully received and will have made a difference to people's lives here in Lincoln. Further donations continue to be welcome and you can leave bags in the porch when you come to Mass or arrange with Tina in the parish office a suitable time at which to bring them. Food items for the food bank are the only items we are currently collecting at church because we know we have sufficient storage and we know that they will be taken to the foodbank collection point in a matter of days. Even before the fact that children who rely on free school meals often go hungry in the school holidays became a story on the news a number of churches in Lincoln were aware of this and set up an organisation called FISH (food in school holidays) and mainly thanks to the Catholic Women's League and their successor organisation we have supported this initiative with financial help. In a similar vein it is also good to acknowledge 'Mary's Meals' which amongst other things provides school meals for children in other parts of the world. Today we give thanks to God for all that has already been done.

Returning to the Gospel reading we heard that the Pharisee asked Jesus the question in order to 'disconcert him'. Many of us will find ourselves feeling somewhat disconcerted by the ongoing pandemic. However it has presented us with opportunities to grow in our love of God and our love of our neighbour. We pray for the grace that we might make the most of such opportunities so that God's will may be done and that His name may be glorified.

For video version please see: <https://youtu.be/OFS1v2Y2fX4>