

## Reflection for the Thirtieth Sunday of the Church's Year

There is a tremendous hostility in the air during the early days of Holy Week when different groups “plot” against Jesus and take turns to round on him seeking “to entangle [him] in his words”.<sup>1</sup> In today’s question about “the great commandment of the Law” there is a hidden snare which is easily lost on non-Jewish readers, and it helps to have a little bit of background information to better understand it.

When the Pharisee refers to “the Law?” he is specifically referring to the Law of Moses or as the Jews call it, “the Torah.” The Torah consists of the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy which Jews believe were all written by Moses himself. Traditionally, there are 613 commandments found in “the Law”. We heard some of them in today’s first reading from the book of Exodus, “*You must not wrong a sojourner or oppress him.....you must not mistreat any widow, or fatherless child.....if you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbour’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering: in what else shall he sleep?*” Others are familiar to us as the ten commandments given by God to Moses on the tablets of stone: “*you shalt not worship false gods, but you shall keep holy the Sabbath day, you shall honour your father and mother. You shalt not kill, not commit adultery, not covet.*” So, which of these 613 would Jesus choose as the “great commandment of the Law”?

The Pharisees were “plotting” against Jesus in the hope of discrediting him as a rabbi and teacher. However, in response, Jesus demonstrates his grasp and his depth of understanding of the Torah. He crafts his answer from two different commandments of the Law. The first of these commandments is drawn from the book of Deuteronomy, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*”<sup>2</sup> And the second commandment is drawn from the book of Leviticus, “*You shall love your neighbour as yourself*”<sup>3</sup>. Fusing these two commandments together he then goes on to assert that this new twofold commandment underpins all that we find written in the scriptures. “*On these two commandments*”, says Jesus, “*depend all the Law, and the Prophets.*” Love of God requires love of neighbour and love of neighbour is incomplete without love of God.

In response to the Pharisee’s question Jesus gives us the new twofold commandment of love. Love of God and neighbour should underpin all our actions and be the touchstone of all we say or do.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 22:15

<sup>2</sup> Deut 6:5

<sup>3</sup> Lev 19:18