

# 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

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In today's Gospel Our Lord tells us the two greatest commandments: first, we must love the Lord our God with our whole being; secondly, we must love our neighbour as we love ourselves. If we genuinely love God, we will also love our neighbours, because we realise that they are all our brothers and sisters; we are all children of the same Father. Saint John writes, *'If anyone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar.'*

One of the most important ways in which we bear witness to our love of God is how we treat other people, especially the poor. Our Lord expects more of us than the bare justice of paying our debts, something expected even of those with no beliefs. God spells out his expectations to Moses in our first reading: hospitality to the stranger in our midst; kindness to those who are not in a position to assert their own rights; generosity rather than exploitation towards those in financial need; concern for individual well-being, not just profit.

The ancient world was familiar with great uncertainty. Then as now, so many lived from hand to mouth. In the Old Testament world land belonged not to the individual but to the family or clan. It could be leased, but not for more than 49 years. It could not be sold. This meant that the stranger in the midst was likely to be a landless labourer, craftsman or trader – the first to lose out in a time of recession or hardship. Widows and orphans were completely dependent on the generosity of family or friends. The Torah forbids usury by which is meant lending money for interest.

The principle that lies behind the Church's social teaching is that Economic activity should exist not for its own sake, but for the sake of human beings, their welfare and happiness. It is wrong to make a profit out of others' needs or misery. A high profit margin or high rate of interest implies that, somewhere along the line, someone is being exploited. That is what usury means, and why it is sinful. We cannot claim to love our neighbour when we are denying him basic justice, and justice is not simply about fulfilling agreements, but looking at the circumstances in which they are made. If you have someone over a barrel because you control the supply of what they need, is the payment you can demand made just because they agree to pay it? As Christians we have a special contribution to make in shaping the future by putting forward principles that offer a new direction, one that shows greater respect for human beings and their needs.

The Catechism offers us a challenge: "The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him."

St. John Chrysostom – St John of the golden mouth who was so critical of the authorities of his day for their extravagance – is more forthright: *"Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." "The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity." When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."*

However, love of neighbour involves more than social policy or concrete acts of generosity as individuals. There is a saying 'as cold as charity'. When we remember that charity means love this is a contradiction. We should be touched by the merciful heart of God Our Father and reach out in love and compassion to those who need our help. In St Luke's Gospel we hear the parable of the Good Samaritan to explain who our neighbour is. The Samaritan reaches out in compassion. He pays the hotel bill at the end but before that he has engaged with the wounded man in a 'hands on' way, cleansing and binding his wounds and placing him on his own donkey. He has recognised their common humanity. 'This man is my neighbour!'