

**30<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020**  
**“ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE” – GOD & NEIGHBOUR TOO!**

*Mt 22.32-40 Ex 22.20.26 1Thess 1.5-10*

Greetings all and welcome once more to our Essendon weekend virtual Mass, now the 30<sup>th</sup> week of the Church's Year in Ordinary Time, although it has been rather extraordinary for us over the last 6 months! At least school is back in full swing, as we had a sports dressup day on Thursday, and I wore my Max Gawn Sox and Demons' and Storm scarves (I'm ecumenical with AFL and NRL, having lived in Sydney for 18 years) and we're hoping for gradual opening up in the broader community, including church, sooner than later. And may the best teams win, so *Go Cats* for my Aunt Betty (*this will be the First AFL Grand Final she has missed since the 1940's – her Requiem Mass here on Monday at 11am*) and *Go Storm*, as I used to say at Manly (*where the Sea Eagles were in the majority*)! Life would be boring if we all went for the same team, and at least someone's happy at the end of the day!

And so we pray, together as we gather in spirit.

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One of the hazards of Siri is that if I ask her to play a hymn with the word *love* in it, she's just as likely to respond with a heavy metal or rap pop song, but one is a relatively safe bet, not quite a hymn, but with a catchy refrain as song of the year in 1967, "*All You Need is Love*", written for Expo 67 in Montreal. And, yes, you guessed it, my favourite group, as Dr Seuss is in literature, so The Beatles in pop music, and Beethoven for classical, just to broaden things out! (*So here it is!*)

We hopefully learn more as we get older, if we've got open minds, and I've learned that this song was written, not as a love song, but as a simple call for the world to come together. Last week I mentioned astronomer Carl Sagan's reference to Planet Earth as *The Blue Dot*, photographed by the Voyager I spacecraft, from beyond the Solar System, a sobering reminder of our precious, precarious planet with 7 billion+ of us all together on it! Expo 67 was the first time there was a global satellite telecast, which we take for granted over 50 years on. The Beatles won the competition for the best song, with simple, repetitive words, so that the people of the world who witnessed the event, could understand its meaning, of calling us all together as one world, one people. Considering the history of world conflict even since then, particularly with genocides and the dark and insidious nature of nationalism, this simple message often seems to have fallen on rocky ground. Of course, the critical question is what is meant by this word 'love'? It has so many meanings in a variety of contexts, romance, family, friendship, community and global connection and responsibility. I think The Beatles were going for global in their simple but catchy little song, as they won the competition for best song for Expo, and it was a number 1 hit!

And so we move to Jesus in today's Gospel, at the heart of what the faith message is about. There is the universal '*Golden Rule*', which states "*Treat others as you want to be treated*" or words to that effect, as variants on the same theme, a principle of most world religions and cultures, not necessarily religious, and on which human rights are based. What does Jesus mean by 'love'?

Significantly, Matthew's Gospel has an atmosphere of hostility surrounding Jesus at this point. Mark's Gospel has this encounter with a more friendly tone from an enquiring lawyer seeking truth from Jesus. Matthew has the Pharisees challenging him and trying to catch Jesus out, as we heard with the essential question of tax and to whom to pay it, Jesus cleverly responding, with the implication of religious faith and government both having their place, one without impeding the other. Give to Caesar for health, welfare, education and infrastructure and give to God what is required to support our faith community and to observe our religious duties.

Pharisees tended to be nitpickers, concerned with the minor details of the law, and had a tendency to keep adding more, with the result of losing the meaning or purpose of law in the first place, and making more laws for the sake of law, rather than for the good of the people, who were largely illiterate and ignorant of the finer details anyway. It didn't stop the Pharisees increasing the burden of law as time went on. By Jesus' time, as Donald Senior tells us, "*Later Rabbinic tradition counted 613 individual commands in the law, all of which were to be respected and obeyed equally.*" This, of course, is absurd and impossible too! There has to be some order and priority or hierarchy of what is more important.

A rabbi named Hillel, however, did subscribe to the Golden Rule as being fundamentally important, along with the Jewish Shema or tradition of Deuteronomy 6.5, as Jesus quotes today, the law to ***“love the Lord our God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*** Matthew has earlier spoken of Jesus command to love one’s enemies (Mt 5.43) and one’s neighbour as oneself (Mt 19.19), but here he combines the two, as if equally important. I was challenged, I think here last year, by someone who knew something about Jewish law, contending that Hillel got in there before Jesus, with combining the two, but it doesn’t really matter, as the principle is what counts. That it’s no use just looking upwards and saying our prayers and coming to church (when we can!), if we don’t connect that with the way we live our lives and the manner in which we treat others, family friends and beyond. It’s all in together.

As a purported canon lawyer, with a broader view of interpretation and priorities after postgraduate studies, and having had to teach it for some 13 years or so, I can only emphasize that law is to free people from what weighs them down, and to primarily serve their needs. Again, while there are 1752 canons in the 1983 Code of Canon Law (here it is in English!), as I’ve said before, I always start with the last, canon 1752, which states that the supreme law is the salvation of souls, which I translate as the ***good of the people***, and equity gets a mention too, which I translate in Australian as ***a fair go for all***. So, law needs to be seen in its proper perspective, and why I have happily been involved in marriage annulment over the last 34 years or so, as a judge, to help people move on in their lives and relationships in the Church.

They weren’t such ‘good old days’ way back there pre-Vatican II, where people felt rejected and excluded from the Church, particularly where divorce, often a necessary good thing in a destructive or dysfunctional relationship, and even moreso perhaps, when remarriage had occurred and life had moved on. Not much ‘love’, empathy or understanding was shown there by the official ‘Church’, nor often its members!

The 1917 Code of Canon Law was nicknamed ***“Doctor Gasparri’s Little Book of Rules”***, (*He’s the chap who later worked on the 1929 Concordat or Lateran Treaty with Mussolini, to secure papal independence from Italy*), with 2414 Canons or rules (*Here it is in Latin, not to be translated for fear lay Catholics would interpret it themselves!*). It had too many penalties said Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, in his later 90’s, and fortunately the penalties are far less in number in the new Code, and the emphasis more circular, positive and pastoral, concerned with the active involvement of all the People of God, and not just the hierarchy telling us to be passive element in the Church, just to ***‘pray, pay and obey’!*** There has to be more to it than that, and there is!

At the heart of a lived faith, Jesus’ call to love God and neighbour is the enduring and primary principle of Christian life and practice, as we take the Gospel to heart and live it in love. Finally, there is something to be said about self-love too, as we’re of no use to others if we don’t have a balance, with a healthy and positive self-image, aware of our own gifts and capacity to love others, by looking after ourselves too. And I am certainly not talking about narcissistic love, where all I care about is myself, totally at odds with the love of God and neighbour, of which Jesus speaks of in the Gospel.

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***25<sup>th</sup> October 2020***