

Mark 12: 28-34

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' 29 Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." 31 The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' 32 Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; 33 and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' 34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Meditation: Now that the Sadducees have had a go at Jesus it is the turn of a scribe. In this case, however, there is, surprisingly, no conflict. The scribe seems to ask Jesus a question with all sincerity, for when Jesus gives the answer, he commends Jesus. The issue is the religious law. What is the chief, the greatest, commandment in the law? Jesus answers like a good Jew by asserting the priority of loving God with one's whole being. But he also attaches the love of neighbour closely to it. One's love for God cannot be complete or genuine if one does not love one's neighbour as oneself. This, far more than the ritual observance of temple worship and sacrifice, is what the love of God, and therefore the law, demands.

For those of us who claim to love God with our whole being, or at least want to love God, what does it mean to love our neighbour? In fact, Jesus makes no distinction in terms of priority or quantity of love in terms of loving God, loving our neighbour and how all that is connected to loving oneself. Think about that. How is loving my neighbour a doorway into better loving myself and better loving God. Jesus is emphasizing the neighbour part in his reply to the scribe, because it's the part that's often neglected in the equation of relationships.

In this season of Covid-19, it is all the more urgent that we think about how we must love our neighbour, especially as we are realizing daily how intertwined our love for one another must be in order to come through this to the other side. It's either together we do this or we will all suffer individually and alone. And this must begin with all those most vulnerable, be they elderly in homes or those on the street or those stuck in overcrowded buildings, apartments and homes. Unless we put all our resources collectively into caring and healing and journeying with one another beginning with those most vulnerable, we will have learned and gained nothing from this whole ordeal.

Prayer: I want to love you, O God, but I don't know what that means. How can I love a movement, a force, an energy that is the ground of all that is? And yet, when I love concrete life in and around me, you challenge me to understand this as loving you too. You challenge me to understand all I devote to you in my worship, prayer and personal devotions, to be connected to my concrete care, compassion and openness to the

living beings and creation around me. It's a great challenge and a great responsibility,
O God. Thank you for your continuing mercy and grace toward me; Amen.