

Readings Exodus 22: 20-26; Thessalonians 1: 5-10; Matthew 22: 15-21



Fr Michael says:

Two Great Commandments

If you visit Capernaum, in The Galilee, you will see some of the friezes which decorated the Synagogue of the town: one of the decorations is the pomegranate, which reputedly has 613 seeds in it. The reason why it is used is that the “Law” consisted of 613 commandments – so it is hardly surprising that the question of which is the greatest comes up. Jesus gives us two, which are interconnected: the love of God flows into our love of neighbour and so to ourselves. They are of equal importance! There is to be no discrimination between peoples, as Exodus reminds us; our example of living this commandment is the inspiration for what we do.

There is a story about an Abbot, Moses, who had a great reputation for holiness. He called together his community to see what they should do to prepare for Easter. They decided to fast for the whole of Holy Week. During the week two visitors came to the monastery, they were starving, so Moses cooked some food for them and to make them feel at ease took a little himself. The other monks saw the smoke and knew that he had cooked food and so broken the fast – they were shocked and confronted him. Seeing their hostility towards him, he said: “What crime have I committed that makes you look at me like this?” “ You have broken the solemn fast” they replied. “I have indeed broken the commandments made by men, but in sharing my food with these brothers of ours, I have kept the commandment of God that we should love one another.” This brought them to earth and they went away wiser men!

There is a great sterility about the lives of those who claim to love God, but really are letting themselves off from the obligation to love others – to do this is to live the Gospel only half-heartedly! There are those too, among us, who do the opposite – bury themselves in caring for the needy but never think of God: they too, despite being more open, are still only living half the Gospel. Jesus shows us the full picture in the course of His life and ministry. He did not say they were the same thing, but we cannot have the one without the other!

We need to reflect about the Total Gospel, avoid separating the two commandments – it is a great and real danger! Those who have faith often lack love and those who love often lack faith. The Gospel has been torn in two. Jesus says that whilst they are not the same thing – they are two sides of one coin. So if we want the Total Gospel, we must put our money where our mouth is and opt for both. Jesus shows us how He is anchored to His Father, through His constant turning to His Father before major events in His Ministry, but also when things have not gone according to plan, to help Him come to terms with this situation. He prays regularly and worships His Father in the Synagogue. This energy source moves Him to serve those around Him, with commitment and dedication, even unto death!