

## Lectio Divina – 30th Sunday of the Year A

### Matthew's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Author is anonymous, but named as 'Matthew the tax collector' by later tradition.
- Written in scholarly 'synagogue' Greek.
- Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
- Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: "When Jesus had finished...."):
  1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
  2. 1<sup>st</sup>: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
  3. 2<sup>nd</sup>: 10 Missionary Discourse
  4. 3<sup>rd</sup>: 13 Parable Discourse
  5. 4<sup>th</sup>: 18 Community Discourse
  6. 5<sup>th</sup>: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
- May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
- Jesus first words are 'to fulfil all righteousness'.
- A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
- 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
- The only Gospel to explicitly mention the 'Church' – Matthew is theologian of the church.
- Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
- Names Jesus as 'Messiah' at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

### Matthew 22:34-40 - things to notice

- This Sunday's Gospel is Jesus' response to a question put by the Pharisees about which commandment is the greatest of the Law (the Torah – first 5 books of the Hebrew bible).
- This was a common topic of debate among rabbis of the time.
- Notice that Matthew attributes a negative motive to the Pharisees in asking the question.
- Jesus answers with two quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 (You must love the Lord, your God...) and Leviticus 19:18 (You must love your neighbour...).
- Deuteronomy: the quote is from the Shema (meaning to listen or to hear). The prayer prayed by all observant Jews every morning and evening begins with, 'Hear, O Israel...'
- Note that *heart, soul, mind* is a way of saying 'your whole self' – not a way of describing parts of a person or parts of the body.
- Without being asked, Jesus adds a second commandment about loving your neighbour as yourself – a quote from the Book of Leviticus.
- Jesus' reply is not particularly original – other Jewish authorities (notably Hillel) said almost the same thing.
- So, this is not a new and original teaching of Jesus. It is solidly based on the Law.
- It is important to note that, in the Torah, to love God means to be loyal to God according to the instructions (commands) God has given. These instructions are about what one is to do, not how one is to feel about God or neighbour. Feelings and emotions cannot, of course, be commanded.
- 'On these two commandments...' – this supplementary comment by Jesus suggests that the whole of the Law and the Prophets are underpinned by this understanding.

- The Ten Commandments, for example, are a mixture of commands about loving God and loving neighbour. In Catholic theology the first 3 are about God and the other 7 about neighbour.
- Most denunciations issued by prophets were about the relationships between love for neighbour and love of God.

#### Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

The first reading is from the Book of Exodus and is all about good treatment of others. God will hear the cry of those who are wronged because God 'is full of pity'.

#### Reflection

Another attempt to trap Jesus is contained in the Gospel this Sunday. Opinions and arguments about which was the greatest commandment were common among the Pharisees and questions about it were frequently asked of rabbis. Clearly, those who asked this question of Jesus were trying to disconcert or 'wrong foot' Jesus in an attempt to discredit him with his reply.

Once again, Jesus does not cleverly sidestep the question; he goes right to the heart of the matter.

Love of God and love of neighbour are brought together in one 'great commandment'. In refusing to be drawn into an 'either/or' response Jesus, as he did last week, brings two separate things into right relationship. Love of God and love of neighbour belong together. That's why the first reading today from Exodus warns against mistreating strangers, widows and orphans and talks about the proper conduct of loans and pledges. The warning comes from God's lips. It's not just a nice piece of social philosophy; it is the demand of living our faith.

It means that true faith, as Jesus teaches it, is about being in loving relationship with God and other human beings. Religious rituals are meant to be ways of reflecting on, savouring, remembering, celebrating and expressing that love. Sometimes they just end up as 'empty' rituals, when love has been replaced by fear, or when love is absent.

The Kingdom of God is not some far off place, but the moments when God's life breaks into the human story. Those moments bring love, wisdom, grace, compassion, generosity, forgiveness and peace. Those practiced in the things of God recognise God's presence most of all in loving relationships. If our rituals grow out of and express our sincere love for God AND neighbour then they have value. We are always at risk of putting ritual above the practise of love.