**XV Per Annum, 2025**

Is it easy, being a Christian? Perhaps, from the outside, it might look that way: after all, isn’t Christianity just about being ‘nice’? Being meek and mild? Aren’t we just meant to, you know, ‘love’ people? Love’s easy, we know all about that.

That’s nonsense, of course. Christianity isn’t about being nice – talk to me about S. Jerome some time – and love is *not* easy. Take the lawyer in today’s Gospel: like a good student, he reels off the great commandment from memory “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.” Notice it’s not Jesus Who says this, it’s the lawyer: this commandment isn’t particular to the New Covenant, it’s in the Mosaic Law.

The lawyer’s question, though, suggests that he hasn’t quite grasped the challenge of that commandment: “who is my neighbour?” With that finely-honed legal instinct, he wants to know exactly who he needs to love ‘as himself’; where does the commandment cease? What are the limits of love?

The answer Jesus gives is confounding. We all know the story of the Good Samaritan, but for a first-century Jew, ‘good’ would emphatically not have been the first word which sprung to mind. Hundreds of years before, the kingdom of Israel was torn in two, when Solomon’s son, Rehoboam ruled, and the south of Israel became Samaria. The Samaritans worshipped the God of Israel differently the Jews of the north kingdom, Judah. And, as separated siblings are wont to, they hated one another.

When Jesus is telling this parable, 150 years haven’t quite passed since the Jews, led by their high priest, had waged war against Samaria and destroyed the temple on Mt Gerizim which was set up as a rival to the Temple in Jerusalem. Fewer than thirty years have passed since some Samaritans had profaned the Temple in Jerusalem by scattering human bones in the holy place.

So these are the people Jesus chooses to illustrate His parable: these are the neighbours whom we are meant to love as ourselves! As if we were to tell an Israeli he ought to love a Palestinian, or an Englishman that he ought to love the French... That’s more than ‘nice’, that’s heroic. It’s *not* easy.

“[T]his commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off.” Thus Deuteronomy recounting Moses’ words at the end of the reading of the Law. How do we reconcile these two ideas? The strangeness of Jesus’ command of love, which seems almost unnatural, against the assertion that all of this is within our grasp, “not too hard” for us?

I wonder if you’ve noticed that the parable Jesus tells, in response to the question the lawyer asks, is all about the second half of the Great Commandment: “[love] your neighbour as yourself”? Apparently the lawyer though the first bit “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind” didn’t need any explanation. ‘Oh yes, of course, *that*, we take that as read.’ But it is the solution to the whole difficulty, because the two are of course only halves of the same commandment.

God is love, and all that God has created, He has created out of love, and with love baked in. That’s inevitable, because the effect has to resemble its cause in some way, so if the cause of all Creation is Love – and it is – then Creation is shot through with love as well. We’re all naturally inclined to love certain things, certain people, which and whom we regard as good, as ‘lovable’. For most of us, those closest to us, those most like us, are easiest to love; we are readiest to love those whose tastes, or cast of mind, or language, or class, or what-have-you, are like our own.

What we find difficult, of course, is loving everyone else. For that we need to add something to nature: we need a supernature. A supernature to bolster our poor efforts at love, and to help us to love in truth. We need “Jesus Christ, […] the image of the invisible God,” Who makes the God-Who-is-love visible to us, by joining the divine to the human in Himself. We need Jesus, “the head of the body, the Church,” so that by being joined together in Him, as His mystical body, we might share in His pre-eminent love. We need Jesus Christ, in Whom “all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell,” so that we too might be reconciled, to ourselves, to our neighbour, and to God. We need the Blood of Jesus, to make peace for us, peace within us, peace between us.

We have all of this in the Sacraments of Holy Church. In our baptisms we are grafted into His Body, and He becomes our Head. In our confirmations the Spirit of Love comes to mark our souls with divine Charity. In our confessions we know reconciliation through the power of God and the Blood of Christ’s Cross. In every Mass He comes near to us, so that the words of Deuteronomy might be fulfilled, “the word is very near to you,” and in every communion, “[the word] is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.” So that you *can* live up to the great Commandment, by God’s grace, to love God with everything you are, and to love your neighbour as yourself.