Thirtieth Sunday of the Year

Matthew 22:34–40

There is a particular kind of patience we reserve for people we don’t live with.

We can be gracious to a stranger in the supermarket, then come home and become deeply irritated because someone has put a cup in the wrong cupboard. We can pray sincerely for peace in the world and struggle to make peace with the person sitting beside us.

Perhaps that is why Jesus puts these two commandments together: love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.

The lawyer in today’s Gospel asks Jesus to identify the greatest commandment. Jesus answers with words familiar to his listeners: love God with your whole heart, soul and mind. Then, without being asked, he adds a second: love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus keeps them together because we so easily pull them apart.

We might prefer a relationship with God that leaves our other relationships undisturbed. Prayer can feel peaceful. People can be complicated. They interrupt us. They misunderstand us. Sometimes they need something just when we have finally sat down.

Yet those encounters are often where our prayer begins to bear fruit. We ask God for patience, and later that day someone gives us an opportunity to practise it. We ask for a generous heart, and someone needs our time.

That doesn't mean loving people is always easy, or that love requires us to accept harmful behaviour. Sometimes love needs an honest conversation or a clear boundary. But it does ask us to recognise that the person before us has a dignity that does not depend on how we feel about them.

And notice those final words: "as yourself".

Some of us speak to ourselves with a harshness we would never use towards anyone else. We remember every failure and dismiss every kindness. But you, too, are someone God loves. You are allowed to receive mercy, to rest, and to begin again.

This week, we might take one relationship into prayer. Someone at home. Someone we have been avoiding. Someone whose name makes us sigh.

Ask God: "Help me to see this person as you see them."

Then choose one small act of love: listen without interrupting, make the phone call, offer the apology, or give someone your full attention.

Here at Mass, we receive the love of Christ. In the days ahead, through ordinary encounters and small decisions, we have the opportunity to pass that love on.