

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and friends,

Last week we reflected on the incremental encroachment of the state in our day to day lives as a result of the pandemic. We reflected furthermore on the conflict of loyalties between the state, our country and its welfare and the values of the kingdom of God. Today's gospel initially turns our thoughts back to the state and the impact it is currently making on virtually every aspect of the way we are living in what is euphemistically called the "new normal." Each day there are new regulations concerning the wearing of masks, the number of us who can mix with or visit other people, whether or not these meetings can be held indoors or outside, and where, when and how often we can travel, and the precautions we have to take when on public transport, restaurants or public places where people used to gather. And as our knowledge of the coronavirus grows, and as those in authority seek to flatten the curve of the infections graph, the laws, by-laws and legal requirements grow exponentially. We know what the general aims are, and most citizens agree and are submissive to government prescriptions, but we have difficulty with those rules and recommendations which seem to be micro-managing our lives.

In many ways we are well placed to understand the dilemmas which many of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries felt, especially when they may have felt the Pharisees and the legal experts which seemed to be in every community were looking over their shoulder to see were they observing the law. The "valley of the squinting windows", associated with rural Ireland, was alive and well in the Galilee of Jesus' day. So it comes as no surprise that many people should ask him what were the essential commandments of the Law. There were, it is said, 613 different laws and the Pharisees would have claimed that they were equally important and needed to be obeyed. So, some with a desire to catch Jesus out but some with a genuine desire to know, his Galilean audience asked him, what are the essential laws, what do all the 613 prescriptions boil down to? Jesus gave a short and pithy answer that was immediately understood by everyone. It would still be the answer on the tongue of every Christian, were the question posed, right down to the present day: *love the Lord your God with all your heart, love your neighbour as yourself*. In the crisis in which we find ourselves in a pandemic which has changed the face of Europe and the world, the latter commandment is the one that so many people are putting into practice every day.

Father Patrick