

## **Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook**

31 October 2021

### **Welcome**

If you ever experimented in the kitchen with a pomegranate, you will know that the pomegranate is bursting with seeds. In Christianity, the fruit is used to symbolise the spread of the Gospel, the abundant seeds of faith. In Judaism, it is much more precise. According to Jewish lore, the pomegranate has 613 seeds, miraculously the same number as the commandments in the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament. The sheer number and complexity of the rules and commandments led people from earliest times to ask which were the most important ones, as in today's Gospel.

### **Topic**

This desire to identify what is at the very heart of faith is relevant to us today, as we undertake the synodal pathway. What's at the very core of our faith? What do we want to keep as we go forward? What do we need to develop to be faithful into the future?

### **Steps**

1. Today's Gospel is a great help in three ways. Already in Jesus' day, some of his fellow Jews had identified love of God and love of neighbour as the key markers of how we live. Jesus is the first to unite the great prayer of Judaism, the Shema Yisrael, from Deuteronomy :1-6, with the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself from Leviticus 19:18. It is a good reminder that the roots of the Christian way are firmly planted in Judaism. Here is something magnificent that we Christians share with our Jewish brothers and sisters.

2. You might also notice that we are invited not simply to believe that there might be a God or that there is a God somewhere out there. We are called to love God, *with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength*. It could easily seem beyond us. You could easily ask, how are we to do that? It is, of course, a gift. St John wrote: In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us (1John 4:10). In response to that breath-taking love, we are called to love in return— and again it is a gift. St Paul writes: the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Spirit which has been given to us (Romans 5:5). It is possible, if we are invited open our heart to receive love and to give love.

The very inspiring Pedro Arrupe, the Basque head of the Jesuits, once put it very movingly, when he wrote:

“Nothing is more practical than finding God,  
That is, than falling in a love in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything.  
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings,  
What you will do with your evenings,  
How you spend your weekends,

What you read,  
Who you know,  
What breaks your heart,  
And what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

3. From the earliest times, believers noticed that while these two commandments can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. The writer of 1 John makes it super clear:

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ... Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4:16, 20-21)

That passage greatly inspired St Augustine, when he wrote, a very long time ago, as follows:

By loving your neighbour and being concerned about your neighbour, you make progress on your journey. Where is your journey, if not to the Lord God, to him whom we must love with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind? We have not yet reached the Lord, but we have our neighbour with us. So then, support the one with whom you are travelling so that you may come to the one with whom you love to dwell.

## **Conclusion**

Pedro Arrupe noticed that nothing is more practical than falling in love with God. In our day, the truly practical way we love our neighbour is by the way we care for the environment. The "environment" is not simply nature: it is our home, the home of our brothers and sisters, the home of our children and grandchildren. We love them taking all the practical steps we can to ensure that the world will continue to be both wonderful and safe. As the slogan has it, there is no planet B. It means reducing our carbon footprint, using less plastic, recycling as much as possible and so on. My individual contribution may seem minuscule, baby steps with little impact. But every step matters and it keeps us conscious of the struggle.

Love does come down to such practical choices and actions. May the many small actions, like the numerous seeds in the pomegranate, bear fruit and may the COP26 be blessed with vision and courage.