

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

Like me, you must be brought to the point of tears and revulsion by the beheading of a teacher near Paris last week. That someone can do such terrible things to another human being in the name of God and of loving and serving God beggars belief. And I'm sure many of our Muslim brothers and sisters are equally saddened and sickened by the killing, who see such violence and brutality as a distortion of their religion.

This isn't of course just an issue for Islam. In the history of Christianity there are many who have professed the Christian faith, but fashioned a horrid distortion and perversion of belief in God and of the Christian religion. Think of the Crusades in the Middle Ages for example; think of the Inquisition; think of the period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. So much killing on both sides, Catholic and Protestant: of heretics, dissenters, pagans, infidels and unbelievers. Think of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland within the lifetime of most of us here, a euphemism if ever there was one for a period of horrendous violence and hatred; and all in the name of God.

In our gospel reading today Jesus brings us back to the nature of true religion. He says that all of the law and the prophets hang on the commandment of **love**. Not some of the law or almost all of the law or a medium amount of the law. ALL of the law and prophets hang on the one commandment of love.

Our highest objective in life must be to **love God** with all that we are and all that we have. He is to be the supreme object of our affections and of our entire lives. Just as we are not content with a superficial and inconstant love in our human relationships, so God asks us for a love which is total, a love of him with our all, with our entire heart, soul, mind and strength.

When we speak of loving God, we are not dealing in vague generalities. To 'love God with our whole heart, our soul and our mind' is to describe our relationship in personal terms. In loving God, we learn to delight in his presence. We encounter the same kind of joy and passion in loving God and pleasing God that we experience when we look into the face of a loved one. To love God in *that way* is life's highest and most fulfilling ambition.

In the same breath Jesus teaches us that love for God is inseparable from love for our neighbour. It's one thing to love God, but that love is incomplete unless we also love our neighbour, and if we truly love God with our whole being, that love will manifest itself in our love for others in ways such as those outlined in our first today from the book of Exodus - caring for those in need, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the poor, the outcast, the vulnerable.

Our love for others – family, friends, enemies, strangers - is the thermometer of the authenticity and totality of our love for God, it's the consequence and the result of our love for God. We can not love our neighbour unless we first love God, just as we can not love the God we cannot see if we fail to love the brother or sister we can see.

True religion consists in the love of God and of neighbour. This is what gives value to worship and to the practice of God's precepts and laws. When we make the time to pray daily and to come to Mass; when we confess our sins and prepare conscientiously to receive Communion; when we wrestle with our passions through fasting or other forms of self-denial; when we humble ourselves to serve others; when we live faithfully - though imperfectly as - Christ's followers, we grow in the love of God and neighbour and shine a bit more brightly with the love of Christ.

The world has seen many examples of violent and hate-filled religious extremism and radicalism. What if it were to witness a different kind of extremism? A Christian extremism of love. Our radical living of love of God and of neighbour that is the root of our religion?