

“I love You, Lord, my strength,
My rock, my fortress, my saviour.
My God is the rock where I take refuge;
My shield, my mighty help, my stronghold.”

God’s chosen people had very graphic and concrete images of God as expressed in today’s responsorial psalm. It is true that God was utterly transcendent, but He was also immanent and close to His people. This earthiness applied not only to the way that they related to God but also expressed itself in the demands of Justice and Love towards their neighbour.

In today’s Reading from the book of Exodus they are ordered to show compassion towards the stranger because they themselves had lived as strangers in the land of Egypt. They were asked to care for the widow and the orphan because widows and orphans had lost their protector and breadwinner.

The Covenant that God had begun with His chosen people had very practical implications as to how the love of God was demonstrated in the love of neighbour.

Our Lord Himself in today’s Gospel summarises the whole of the commandments in these two great commandments; “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself.”

My friend reflecting on today’s first reading and on the Gospel describes a striking difference in INTENTION and MOTIVATION.

In the Old Testament the commandment of LOVE had to be IMPOSED under threat of God’s avenging ANGER! “If you are harsh, they will surely cry out to me; My anger will flare, and I shall kill you with the sword..”

In the New Testament however we are motivated by LOVE. The Father has revealed His Love, in the life, encounters and Parables of Christ.

My friend was explaining that once we REALISE GOD’S LOVE FOR US two things follow:

- 1) God becomes irresistible (we **must** love in return one who loves me so much!)
- 2) We **must** love our neighbour

Saint John in his first letter states: "My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too must love one another. No one has ever seen God but as long as we love one another God will live in us and His love will be complete in us." (1 John 4: 11-12)

It would be useful to reflect on how we put these commandments into practice in the present circumstances of the Covid19 Pandemic.

One of the aspects of our lives that have changed a little is not having direct physical contact with family members; this is especially true of the elderly who have had to isolate. Perhaps see this as an opportunity to get to know others with whom we would not normally associate – those whom the scriptures describe as "The stranger in our midst." ; those whom we might in normal circumstances not take much notice of or even avoid.

We might remind ourselves that God loves each person and God cannot be mistaken. Therefore, there is something loveable in each person. The Stranger might even be members of our own household with whom we have fallen out or who have tested our patience.

I was delighted to watch several species of birds feeding from the feeders in the garden this morning, especially the family of Chaffinches. I was reminded of our Lord's words in Matthew Chapter 6: "Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are?" (Matthew 6:26)

Today let us accept the Lord's invitation to see what is loveable in each other.

"This has taught us Love- that He gave up His life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1 John 3: 16)