



31st Week of the Year 3 November 2024

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“You will show me the path of life ” (Communion Antiphon)

In the Gospel of St Mark on the 31st Sunday Jesus is questioned by a Scribe about the greatest commandment; it requires Jesus to interpret the Law of Moses. The Sunday Connection Commentary from Loyola Press reminds us that the Mosaic Law consists of the Ten Commandments and many additional commandments, numbering into the hundreds. For a devout Jew, adherence to the Mosaic Law is an expression of faithfulness to God’s covenant with Israel. The ranking of these commandments was regularly debated among the teachers of the Law.

Jesus was not the only Jewish religious teacher to connect these two commandments, Love of God and Love of neighbour. Both of these commandments were central elements of the religious tradition that Jesus learned from the Jewish community, and they continue to be central aspects of contemporary Jewish understanding. Jesus’ response to his questioner proposed an integral connection between these two aspects of the Jewish Law. Love of God finds its expression in our love for our neighbour. Sunday Connection says: *“Many believe, however, that this connection was heard in a new and fresh way when spoken by Jesus.”* The Scribe agrees with Jesus’ teaching that the commandments to love God and love neighbour stand above the commandment to offer worship and sacrifice in the Temple. With this dialogue Jesus appears to close the debate with the Jewish authorities. St Mark in the Gospel section for the 31st Sunday concludes *“after that no one dared to question him anymore.”*

Last week, in my Reflection, I referred to the publication on Thursday 24 October by Pope Francis of *“Dilexit Nos, He loved us”* (1 John 4:10) his Encyclical on Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Encyclical sets out to unpack what *“Loving God and loving neighbour”* means for today i.e. to interpret Sacred Heart Devotion for the contemporary world. Alessandro Di Bussolo in Vatican News writes: *“Pope Francis prepares a new reflection on the love of Christ represented in his Holy Heart. He calls for a renewal of ‘authentic devotion’ to the Sacred Heart, recalling that in the Heart of Christ “we find the whole Gospel.” It is in His Heart that “we truly come at last to know ourselves and we learn to love” (30). Archbishop Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops writes “The ills of modern society can read like a litany of incurable diseases: consumerism, secularism, partisanism.....In his latest encyclical...the Holy Father teaches us that devotion to the heart of Jesus can open our hearts to renewed ways we can love and be loved.”*

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Subtitled “On the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ” the 28,000 word text draws on Scripture, church teaching and the writings of various saints regarding the devotion, which has a centuries-long history. Gina Christian writing in OSV (Our Sunday Visitor) News says it *“is intended to complement Pope Francis’ previous two encyclicals on social teaching, “Laudato Si; on care for our common home” and “Fratelli Tutti: on fraternity and social friendship.” “The present document can help us see that the teaching of the social encyclicals is not unrelated to our encounter with the love of Jesus Christ.”* Pope Francis wrote. *“For it is by drinking of that same love that we become capable of forging bonds of fraternity, of recognising the dignity of each human being, and of working together to care for our common home.” “We need this timely counsel”* Archbishop Broglio said in his statement.

Christian, in her article, quotes Fr Thomas Dailey, Author of ‘Behold This Heart’: St Francis de Sales and Devotion to the Sacred Heart, who said to OSV News: *“In an age where we are at each other’s throats – whether it’s simply disagreeing with positions or even going to war – appealing to the heart not only of people, but more importantly of Christ, refocuses us on what really matters to being human.”* She goes on to quote Timothy O’Donnell, author of “Heart of the Redeemer” who said the Pope’s new encyclical *“could really go a long way to help people get back to what’s really essential in Christianity....where often times we are affected far more by the atmosphere of secularity, (rather) than drawing from the riches of a relationship with Christ.”* And, it is Christ, O’Donnell said, *“who brings love to a world that really is starving for it.”*

Pope Francis bring us the riches of Devotion to the Sacred Heart in a new and fresh way for the times in which we live. I will be reflecting on it as I celebrate Mass on All Saints Day tomorrow, 1 November, the First Friday so linked to the popularising of this ancient devotion by St Margaret Mary Alacoque 350 years ago. The Encyclical spells out for us how to live the challenge of the Gospel for the 31st Sunday: *“To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength and to love your neighbour as yourself.”* As we proclaim in the Communion Antiphon:

“You will show me the path of life”

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