

The first of today's readings, from Leviticus, lays down a big challenge for us: "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy".

Read literally, this is a call to be perfect, to be flawless. That is beyond our reach. We depend on the generosity of God's love to forgive us for those many times when we get it wrong.

Being holy means being 'set apart', which requires wholehearted dedication to God in all that we do and say. Our call is to try to be the best people we can be.

So how do we do that? Leviticus offers some pointers: behave fairly, don't spread gossip, don't bear grudges. All summarised by the words: "love your neighbour as yourself".

I would underline the words 'as yourself'. We are called to love our neighbour (and remember our neighbour is anyone and everyone we encounter on our journey through life). But we are also called to love ourselves – and not to feel that we are unworthy of God's love.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is asked to say which commandment is the greatest. This question was meant as a trap, as the questioners hoped that Jesus would incriminate himself by devaluing important commandments. But Jesus offers an answer that could not be faulted:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments".

The first of these comes from Deuteronomy 6.5, the second from our Old Testament reading, Leviticus 19.18.

In many ways, these two commandments are really one. Our love for God is demonstrated by the way we treat all that he has created. As St. John puts it, in 1 John 4:

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God ... Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another ... Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen".

John uses strong words to make the point that if we say we love God, that must affect the way we live our lives. We need to show care and concern for those around us (and, I might add, for the world of which we are stewards).

The exchange which follows in our second reading, about the status of the messiah, serves as a warning to the religious authorities that Jesus is speaking the words of God. From that point, they stop trying to trap him and instead find another way to get rid of him. We can use this exchange as a springboard for thinking about how, in Jesus, we see God himself – we see love made flesh.

Sometimes the words of Jesus make us uncomfortable. We are called to look at things differently, through the eyes of Jesus rather than through worldly eyes. The religious leaders of Jesus's day closed their ears and tried to silence him. For them, his message was just too uncomfortable.

May we be more open to the challenges that Jesus presents us with, to love God and to love our neighbour, to be the best that we can.