

THE LAW OF LOVE - *the Ten Commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes*

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Introduction

This is where the faith seems to become hard work. Until now, we have looked at what God has done and has sworn to keep doing for us – what *God* has done for *me*. We have looked at his commitment to speak to us and reveal himself to us, first through creation, then through his chosen leaders such as Abraham and Moses. Then through the living Word, as it is spoken by the prophets and as it is written in the books of Sacred Scripture of which God himself is the author. We have seen how this reaches a climax with the definitive Word of God - no longer mediated through human agents and set down in books but *incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ* - a once-for-all-time-and-still-continuing self-revelation as Jesus continues to lead us to the Father in the teaching and worship of the Catholic Church. We have seen that as members of the Church, God has made seven great life-giving oaths to regenerate us and to rebuild our human nature, which has been ravaged by sin. In these seven oaths, he has sworn to give us his very life, which we know as the Holy Spirit. *The new creations, which these sacramental oaths make of us, are from beginning to end the work of God, and God alone*, who is the single driving force behind the effective work of the Church, Christ's visible Body on earth. Thus far, nothing is asked of *us* except the willingness to accept the gift of divine life as it has been offered.

Now we will look at the consequences of all that God is prepared to do for us. Our vocation is to become God's children - to be enriched by God beyond anything we deserve:

- “*To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood, or of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” (Jn. 1:12-13)

This is about a change in our very being - we become God's own children, sharing his nature. We are not ‘like’ his children: we actually *are* his children. St. Peter tells us that God has given us divine power so that we may learn to live in holiness and escape the corruption of the world “*and become partakers in the divine nature*” (2 *Pet. 1:4*). This is done to us by God through the sacraments, especially in Baptism, and we have already looked, in the past seven sessions at how each of the seven great

sacramental oaths is capable of changing us (if we are willing to co-operate). If there is any confusion in us, St. John speaks in words of one syllable:

- *"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; **and so we are.**" (1 Jn. 3:1)*

This new status, as children of God, requires that we live accordingly. We ARE God's children, so we are called to LIVE as God's children. Our lifestyles must reflect the beliefs that we hold. If we are given a share in God's life, we are asked to live as children of God:

- *"I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." (Eph. 4:1)*

1. Faith in Action

Christ himself insisted that the teaching he gave concerning God and man was not a matter simply for believing. Believing on its own was *important* to Christ but insufficient on its own. Faith in Christ seeks visible, physical expression - it demands consequent *action*. We all know that actions speak louder than words: lying with the tongue is very easy - but it is hard to keep up a pretence in our actions. Soon enough, our actions will indicate what we truly believe, once all the fine words are said and done. We can make all the right noises, speak words of compassion, urge forgiveness, gentleness, virtue etc – but at the same time make no effort to put these into practice. We have a word for this - we call it 'hypocrisy'. Christ came across it all the time, especially in the scribes and Pharisees who observed all the little regulations of the Law of Moses (like ritual washing) but at the expense of the primary law of love, which they made little effort to observe. They reeled off long prayers in public places so as to be admired by passers-by. BUT since their prayers sprang from hearts that did not desire to change and become like God through humility, mutual service and self-sacrifice their prayers were futile:

- *"Not every one who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, **but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven.**" (Mt. 7:21)*

Indeed, to make his point absolutely clear, Christ contrasts the stupidity of the man who listens to Christ's words but fails to order his life according to his teaching, with the sense of the man "*who hears these words of mine and acts on them*" (Mt. 7:24). The first builds his house on sand - since it lacks foundation, the house crashes to the ground when the floods rise and gales blow. How do we apply this? Christ is comparing faith that is never put into practice in the believer's life with an architect who has no thought for foundations, for planning ahead. In this situation, all he builds will be temporary and vulnerable. When the house is tested, it fails. By the same token, Christ teaches that faith in him is fragile if it remains in the realm of the mind and the heart, in the emotions and the realm of feelings *but without impinging on the way we live*. These are the solid foundations of the Christian life that give our faith security, strength, endurance and the ability to survive and grow even under intense pressure. When our faith is not practised but stays an individualistic matter, neither

shared with others nor lived out in the manner in which we go about our lives and work, then our faith will *appear* to be secure and strong as long as all is going well. However, it is dangerously flawed and precarious - and will not survive the testing of modern-day persecution: apathy, indifference, a little gentle mockery from friends, the ceaseless targeting of the media, scandals among the clergy, a personal crisis such as bereavement of a relative or friend etc. The seed that was sown on rocky ground did indeed spring up immediately, but as soon as the sun rose, when any trial, persecution or circumstance arose which made the practise of the faith demanding, then the shoot withered because there were no roots to nourish and sustain it.

The second man in our Lord's parable builds his house on rock. His home is secure - his beliefs are borne out by his deeds and his faith has directed the course of his actions: the house withstands the roughest weather. We are all familiar with the phrase "practice what you preach", and we regard the minister who fails to do this as a hypocrite: well it applies not just to priests and deacons but also to *all the baptised*. ***Christ's teaching here is to practice what we profess to believe*** - and that means that we are all in danger of becoming hypocrites (laity no less than ministers) if we make no effort to regulate our lives according to the teachings we claim to profess.

Christ confirms the thrust of his teaching in the famous passage describing the last Judgement in Matthew 25. The Lord separates the sheep from the goats along the lines not of faith - for they all have faith - *but of their actions*. The righteous (the sheep, placed on his right) are those who recognise Christ as their "Lord", AND as a result of that decision of faith make sure that they live in accordance with their faith: they visit Christ in the sick, they give Christ food in the hungry and water in the thirsty. They are rewarded with eternal life because what they *did* in their lives reflected what they *believed*. In contrast, the goats on the Lord's left are cast out and punished - not because they have no faith but because their faith never interacted with their lives. They do acknowledge Christ as their "Lord" (25:44) - and the implication seems to be that if they had known it was Christ, they would have come to his aid. It is not their lack of faith which damns them but the fact that *their faith was never strong enough in them to change their lives*.

The most outspoken of all is St. James in his letter, which all Christians believe is inspired by God, a part of the canon of Sacred Scripture and therefore an infallible teacher of truth. St. James is absolutely unequivocal, and we should be left in no doubt as to the teaching of Christ on this matter: faith on its own, without what James calls "works" (i.e., putting the faith into actual practice), is *completely worthless*.

- *"Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like." (James 1:22-24)*

The word of God is a force for change within the disciple. To embrace it is to accept within one's life the almighty power of the Holy Spirit, and this will manifest itself in the way we live. If it does not, we are living a lie, accepting the attitudes and perceptions of a world that has rejected the very words that we claim are life giving and the centre of our lives:

- *"Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls." (James 1:21)*

Ultimately, we are past masters at spiritual doublethink: we are able to profess one thing but act according to completely different principles. For this reason, Christ, the Apostles and the Church throughout the centuries have insisted with a single voice that the only adequate demonstration of genuine faith is in the fruit that it produces in the lives of the faithful. ***Faith impels us to faithful action: acts that are in effect the faith lived out in the physical world.*** The actions, or works, are no more (and no less) that love lived:

- *"What does it profit, my brothers, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and **I by my works will show you my faith.** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder...For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead." (James 2:14-19, 26)*

Love is essentially no more than the faith we believe, acted out in the way we live. Love is: ***faith in action.***

2. God's Call to us

The question inevitably arises in every organisation, never more strongly than in a religious group: "Since we believe these things, how should we behave?" We are Catholic Christians, and for us, the response is both beautifully simple and frustratingly ambiguous: time and time again, this question is raised by the people of Israel (as we read in the Sacred Scriptures), it is still present within the early communities of Christ's disciples (as we see in the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, St. John and St. Jude), and to this day, we are still asking the same question. Each time the same response is given by God (through the Law, the Prophets, in Christ, through the apostles and in the living authoritative teaching of Christ today - the teaching of the Catholic Church) - ***love.***

Our actions must be inspired by genuine love, primarily of God – which receives physical expression in our love of each other. Beyond this, the actions we choose to show our love need to be configured or designed to be truly expressive of genuine love, not simply expressions of the feeling of love. In other words, love is not just the feeling we get - it has a character and a content. We need to ensure that we do things that actually ARE loving, not just the actions that appear loving to us at the time. There are any number of statements in the Sacred Scriptures that summarise this teaching. When the people of Israel are about to enter the Promised Land (i.e., God has kept his side of the Covenant), Moses gives God's Law to them, explaining the response God invites the people to make to show their gratitude:

- *“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:4-7)*

When the new Lawgiver, the second Moses (by which I mean Christ himself) is speaking of the true Promised Land (the Kingdom of God), and explaining the meaning of the Law of God to his people which will enable them to enter this land, He is asked what the greatest commandment is: his reply is to repeat Moses, and to show its consequences:

- *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Mt. 22:37-40)*

Christ repeatedly asks his disciples to love - both of God and of neighbour, ending with his strongest call of all, which is no less than an order:

- *“This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you ... **This I command you, to love one another.**” (Jn. 14:12,17)*

St. Paul is no less explicit. Love is an *obligation* for the Christian:

- *“Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.” (Rom. 13:8)*

So far so good. Love of neighbour and love of God are essential. Love fulfils every commandment of the Law, and without love, every action we carry out and each gift we are given is empty and absolutely worthless. Even *faith* itself can be absolutely worthless and without effect if it is exercised without love – remember Christ’s words about those who *say* “Lord, Lord” but do nothing about it. Faith can be of no benefit to us at all if it is dead (i.e., as St. James says, if it is not accompanied by acts generated by that faith – loving actions):

- *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and **if I have faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” (1 Cor. 13:1-3)*

3. Our Response to God's Call

Thus far it is beautifully simple: if we are loving, we are doing all that is required of us by God; so, our salvation, by the pure gift of God, is assured. Such a simple and obvious solution merely raises a far more complicated question: if all I have to do to

be saved is to *love*, what does loving entail? What do I have to do, in practical terms, to be truly loving to God and to my neighbour? Basically, what does 'love' mean? This is the same question the rich young man asked of Christ Himself: "*Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?*" Christ's reply is the reply the Church gives today, and has consistently taught through the centuries - and it is as disappointing to the ears of our own contemporary society as it was to the rich young man when Christ first gave it:

- “ ‘*Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments*’ [The young man] said to him, ‘Which?’ And Jesus said, ‘*You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honour your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself*’.” (Mt. 19:17-19)

This answer is disappointing because Christ does not let the young man off the hook: he doesn't say, “well, as long as you *mean* well”, or “obey the law of God – and don't worry about *why* you're doing it.” Either of these would have made life so easy: we would just have to have the right intention, OR we would just have to go through the motions of obedience and then we could be certain of salvation. Instant reassurance. But Christ does not say this. His reply should make us think – not just about *what* he meant but also about how we are meant to put it into practice.

In the eyes of Christ, *love has a specific content*. In other words, there are certain actions that are of themselves incompatible with love because they contradict the very meaning of love. Thus far, most people would agree. Indeed, every culture and every society has held their own beliefs about what could never under any circumstance be regarded as acceptable or good. Even today, in our pluralistic society and in an age when the majority of Westerners have no affiliation to any denomination and when faith seems to be taking quite a beating from our culture - there are still actions, attitudes which the vast majority of society would argue could never be acceptable or tolerated: racism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, cash for questions, child abuse, torture, cruelty to animals are but a few.

However, the various Christian communities disagree very deeply when we try to describe those actions that can never be termed loving, and this will depend absolutely on our definition of love. The problem comes when we try to state those actions which *have never been and never will be justifiable*, because history points out to us that although every society has held that there are some actions that are always wrong, almost every generation has produced its own list of inherently unloving actions and no two lists are the same. Even in the case of child abuse, we would do well to recall that what we would now term the abuse of children was not considered such in ancient Greece - not only was it acceptable, it was practically expected, and considered the highest and most pure form of love. That which in one generation is considered unthinkable, is, in the next, accepted as lying within the boundaries of the moral law (for example, see the change in thinking in the last two generations regarding euthanasia, abortion, experimentation on living human embryos, contraception, homosexual love, sex before marriage, divorce, human cloning), while other actions which have been generally accepted in the past and are now considered undeniably wrong (such as slavery, drug pushing, colonialism, racism, sexual discrimination, smoking and the careless destruction of our global ecology). Each

generation considers its own moral menu as embodying eternal truth, as timelessly valid and therefore unchangeable – and yet each generation has its own unique opinion as to the ingredients that make up that moral menu.

This inevitably leads us to the question: are there really any timeless moral values, or, when we say timeless, do we only mean that they are absolutely wrong for as long as we say they are (and that when we say that these unthinkably unloving actions are actually loving, then they become so)? The way human societies have developed until today indicate that so-called timeless norms of right and wrong are only valid for as long as we say they are, and that once we agree that what used to be wrong is actually acceptable, then it becomes not simply legal but also morally right. Certainly every generation would claim to believe in timeless moral norms: it's just that we find it almost impossible to stick with one definition of these norms!

Against this background, the Catholic Church has always taught, and teaches today, that there are some actions that were considered contrary to the Law of God at the time of Christ, and that that teaching is still valid today, and will ever be the case. Going back to Christ's answer to the rich young man, the Church holds the Ten Commandments as the ten keystones of morality: infringing any one of those commandments will always involve actions which are unloving. Our intentions may well be very good - we may *intend* great good to flow from our action - but we can be certain that if we act against one of the Commandments, we are doing something which is not loving and which will cause damage not only to other people but also to ourselves.

Christ's reply to the young man needs to be thought about carefully. He is asked what good deeds are essential for us to inherit eternal life. The implication of the question is that there ARE certain actions that are obligatory. Don't rush over this too quickly - many people today will find this very hard to accept: we are saying that there are certain actions which Christ in effect underlines as *essential for salvation*. NOTE that the rich man does not ask “what must I *believe* in order to inherit eternal life?” but “what must I *DO*?” SO, salvation is not just about what you *intend* to achieve (our good intentions) but also about *what we actually do*. AND, in addition, the strong force of the text is that certain actions are *incompatible with salvation*: just as some actions are essential for salvation, so too there are actions which can never be reconciled with the call to holiness. Christ's immediate answer is to underline the commandments - to Christ, these are central to the way of life of the children of God. This was true in the Old Testament and is confirmed by Christ as lying right at the very centre of Christian morality.

Some people object at this point. But the New Testament is about LOVE, not about the mindless obedience to commands laid down by God. The whole point about the New Testament, they argue, is that Christ clears away the old law and replaces it with the new. The old law was characterised by commands, blind obedience, external observance, ritual performance - it was short on intention, motive etc. It was about *doing* the right thing - the pharisaic extreme of externally obeying the commands but internally consumed with bitterness, cruelty, malice and pride. HOWEVER, Christ frees us from all that. He sweeps away the law, giving us the freedom of the children of God. External observance of the Law is dismissed by Christ as futile and powerless to save, and what matters is *love* - provided you and I love, then the precise details of

what we do are irrelevant. This is quite a popular view - and it is not new: St. Jude refers to it in his letter when he speaks of “*ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness*” (Jude v.4). It basically means that for the Christian, all actions are morally good and allowed. Christ has saved us (past tense), so what happens after that saving is irrelevant: we could become insatiable lechers and not affect our salvation one bit. Somehow this does not tie in very well with the teaching of Christ. Our Lord NEVER taught that he had come to sweep away the law. On the contrary, he said quite the opposite: he confirmed the role of the Old Testament Law in the life of his disciples. He taught them without room for confusion:

- “*Think NOT that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven.*” (Mt. 5:17-19)

So, we have absolutely no grounds for saying that Christ came to liberate us from all the laws of the Old Testament so that we would be absolutely free to do exactly as we liked. Christ frees us from the liturgical and ritual laws of the Old Testament - but he categorically confirms the binding value and lasting need for the moral commandments – which he has come not to abolish but to bring to even greater fulfilment and perfection.

Are the Commandments a form of straitjacket designed by God - an arbitrary list of forbidden actions designed to get us used to obeying God when he commands? NO - they are not arbitrary. Quite the contrary, they are the first step in trying to answer the question “what is LOVE?” The Commandments are eight negative and two positive definitions of love in action. In effect, the Commandments tell us that, properly understood, the actions described are *definitely not loving actions* – no matter what the circumstances are or the motives of the person doing them. Many people today will object to this. Christ tells us to love - but the restrictions of the Commandments forbid the actions that I feel are loving. We can almost come to the conclusion that love and the Commandments are incompatible! If we do come to this conclusion, we need to go back to the words of Christ:

- “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments...he who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.*” (Jn. 14:15,24)

The Law of Love, which Christ commands us to, includes the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. We think of love today as being the same thing as *feeling loving* – that feeling of warmth when we are conscious of the emotions of our hearts. BUT – Christ knows full well (as do you and I) that *feeling loving* and actually *doing the truly loving thing* are often very different things. For an example – is the boss who sleeps with his secretary doing a truly loving thing (ask his wife!)? He probably in that moment *feels* that he is showing love, but we might think differently. The problem is that we have a very self-centred understanding of love. ‘Love’ to a westerner means whatever action I think at the time feels most lovely. But this isn’t

love – because if it was love, why did Christ ever go to the crucifixion? We are told he did this out of love – does that mean he chose the cross because it made him feel warm all over and all loving? Of course not – there is more to love than just the feeling of being emotional and loving. Married couples who have shared each other’s lives for thirty or sixty years know that love is more than doing just what they anticipate will make them feel warm and loving all over. Love exists outside these emotional highs, too. Love is the choice to put someone else first – and this always involves one thing: personal sacrifice. ***The Law of Love is the Law of self-sacrifice.*** When Christ asks St. Peter if he loves Christ, Peter is told the consequence of that love – “Feed my lambs”, “Tend my sheep”, “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:15,16,17). Love means *the emptying of self to enable us to serve each other.* Love is the practical implication of receiving the new life of the sacraments. It is the character of life that is placed within us when we receive God's life and become God's children. Love is the vocation that is fully human - only in ridding ourselves of the impulse to seek our own comfort and desires are we able to achieve the full potential of human nature. How do we know this? Because the only human being who was able to live out his humanity to its fullest perfection (Christ) did so through a life of absolute service and ultimately through the laying-down of his own life for the good of his brothers. This is the nature of love - *it seeks the perfection of the one who is loved,* and is prepared to deny itself the comforts that are available so as to benefit the other. The hidden nature of love is ***the Cross:*** the choice to suffer on behalf of the beloved. It is seen in so many ways in the society in which we live - most frequently in the sacrifices made by parents for their children. Loving parents will deny themselves every comfort for the sake of their children - and in the most extreme cases will be prepared to offer their own lives so that their children may live. Only love will lead human beings to act in this way.

Some people object to the Commandments on the grounds that they take away our freedom - God orders us away from certain actions and by doing so he has limited our freedom to choose right and wrong. I think this argument is the most blatantly childish of the many you will come across. Only a child is unable to see the difference between a law that reveals a vulnerability within us (such as “*Johnny, don't put your fingers in that socket*”) and a law that is unnecessarily restrictive and imposed for the purpose of control and domination (such as “*All Jews will wear a yellow star for the purpose of identification*”). The child sees *all* rules as removing his or her freedom - the adult has the objectivity to see the need for some laws that protect us from our own dangerous behaviour. The Ten Commandments may appear arbitrary expressions of God's law-making power but we don't believe that our Father acts this way. Far from these laws being arbitrary, they are more like the warning to Johnny to keep his fingers out of the socket. The Commandments are descriptions of ways in which human life is vulnerable - pursuing these actions will lead to inevitable damage. In the same way, the maker’s handbook for a diesel car may include the warning “DO NOT POUR PETROL INTO THIS ENGINE” - this is not a *restriction of the freedom of the driver* but a description of the design specifications of the diesel engine. Pouring petrol into the tank will cause the engine to explode because the diesel engine is not designed to withstand the pressure and intense temperature of petrol combustion. In a similar way, the Commandments are the designer's instructions as to how to use a particular model called “humanity” - certain actions frustrate his ability to function adequately and cause him immense damage. For us to realise that these actions are dangerous to us is a cause of relief because it means that we can avoid catastrophic abuse of the system God has built. Imagine buying a car but not being told whether it

was diesel or petrol - this is the situation we face without the commandments. In every moral situation we would face the problem of which pump to choose when the car needed refuelling: the constant risk that the choice we made could cause the engine to run perfectly, or to be absolutely destroyed.

The Commandments are about us discovering the truth about human nature and the divine nature. We can only be better prepared to face the decisions of the future if we are already primed with the truth about ourselves. Without the truth, we have a false sense of our options and abilities. Without the truth about what will cause us damage, we have more options to choose in any situation - but we have the fear that some or even most of the options facing us are dangerous or even lethal (and a father who would let his children face daily lethal situations without *some* warning as to the dangers is a father who abuses his children through neglect and indifference). Knowing and accepting the truth about ourselves will remove many of these false options and reveal them as deceptive, promising pleasure but delivering long-term consequences we would never choose. Knowing the truth gives us the opportunity of choosing the path that preserves our lives and the lives of those we love. Knowing the truth about ourselves liberates us from the illusion of these alternative courses of action and shows them in their true nature as options which will bring us and others greater harm. In effect, *the truth sets us free* (Jn. 8:32).

4. The Beatitudes

The Ten Commandments of the *Old* Testament are ten curses placed by God through Moses at Mount Sinai on ten actions that are of themselves damaging to the one who does them and to those to whom they are done. Christ's reply to the young man shows us that they are still in force and valid today. BUT the New Testament places them in a context that shows their true character. The *New* Testament shows us a new Moses, Jesus Christ, giving the fulfilment of the Law on a new Mount Sinai (the mount of the Beatitudes) – only in this case the new Moses pronounces not more curses but eight blessings. The Beatitudes are a description of the necessary mentality that needs to underpin our obedience of the Ten Commandments. The Beatitudes point out behaviour and actions that flow not from servile obedience but from the heart inspired with divine love. They are self-emptying actions, the behaviour of a disciple who accepts suffering not grudgingly but because his/her sights are set on a goal which goes beyond earthly comfort. Eight categories of character are described, and they all have at least one thing in common - those who fall into any one of the categories is *vulnerable*.

1. ***THE POOR IN SPIRIT***: those who are detached from earthly standards of acceptability and value such as wealth, power, and status. These people will often be the disempowered and socially overlooked.
2. ***THOSE WHO MOURN***: those who regret the passing of anything which is holy - not only in the dying of those who are loved, but also those who mourn the erosion of good in society.
3. ***THE MEEK***: always prone to be exploited and then discarded.

4. ***THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS:*** usually regarded as cranks by society since they chose personal suffering as the means of achieving personal holiness and to highlight spiritual values in danger of being overthrown in society.
5. ***THE MERCIFUL:*** to many today, mercy is a sign of weakness. It is not generally a principle of law in our courts, and has never been an accepted principle of business. A rival is to be crushed. Those who show mercy only give their opponents the opportunity to recover and turn the tables.
6. ***THE PURE IN HEART:*** the innocent abroad. This is usually seen by the world as naivety, which is at best regarded as quaint, but often seen as head-in-the-clouds idealism and an opportunity for the ruthless to make a quick buck through exploitation and manipulation – see the film “Rain Man” about Tom Cruise’s attempts to ingratiate himself with his estranged autistic brother Dustin Hoffman so that he can inherit his recently-deceased father’s extensive estate.
7. ***THE PEACEMAKERS:*** these are usually the first to be shot at – they draw fire from both sides in a dispute.
8. ***THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE:*** those who draw the wrath of their culture for their attempts to live according to the law of holiness - the doctors who are refused entry to a local practice because they will not consent to abortion whenever it is requested.

The Beatitudes are the description of the attitude we need when we attempt to obey the Ten Commandments of Love. They place the purpose of our actions clearly in the life to come, since none of the Beatitudes make sense in this life alone - none of them is a recipe for earthly popularity or acceptability. They only make sense to a mind attuned to God, and acting on love, which is prepared to accept suffering here, and now for the sake of God and the promotion of the good of neighbour above that of oneself.

In proclaiming the Beatitudes, Christ completes the Ten Commandments. He shows how the mere performance of the law in itself need not be effective. We may refrain from killing - only to live by hatred and bitterness (which is to kill in the heart). We may never commit adultery in the flesh, but live lives of mental lust. What we have in the Beatitudes is the antidote to this pharisaic literalism. We are called to obey and fulfil the commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes: this means to accept them with the mentality of the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness sake etc. In this way, we will be keeping the actions required by our nature as children of God but without falling into the trap of the Pharisees for whom outward observance was the completion of the law, regardless of our motives or intentions.

5. The Ten Commandments in the Spirit of the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes give us a wholly new attitude to bring to living the commandments. We are still committed to all ten - but Christ has fulfilled them in a way mankind had not understood before the Incarnation. Christ obeys them not in servile fear or with a reluctant, grudging tolerance. He fulfils them voluntarily and by choice. Christ completes the Commandments through love of mankind that is motivated by his love of the Father. This turns the Ten Commandments into something new. No longer are they ten restrictions on our behaviour that are to be accepted just because God says so - they are instead statements about the dignity of other human beings. In themselves the ten describe ten forms of behaviour that are inconceivable to the disciple of Love - but they go much further. Seen in the light of the love that the Beatitudes display, they become not only ten prohibited actions but also an entire system of moral thinking and behaviour. Each Commandment becomes a category of behaviour that offends against love and the dignity of the children of God. If we are to avoid killing (fifth Commandment), then the loving heart will not stop there but will strive to avoid the anger that leads to killing; then there are all the ways we can kill without injuring the body - slander and libel, gossip, malicious rumour etc. Each Commandment becomes a positive exhortation: "Thou shalt not kill" becomes "Protect and enhance the lives of all with whom you come into contact."

When we are motivated by love of neighbour, the Ten Commandments lead us to appreciate and build-up what is good and to avoid all that damages the good within others. If our motive is love, we model our whole lives according to the mentality of the Commandments because they preserve the dignity of the ones we love:

1. ***You shall have no strange gods before me.*** This commandment promotes the virtues of faith (so that we do not grow lukewarm or negligent), hope (in the blessings God will give us from his love) and charity. It is about how conscientiously we pray, our constant search for deeper understanding. Only in its negative form is it about the danger of idolatry, atheism, divination, paganism etc.
2. ***You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*** This is not immediately about swearwords but about blasphemy. God's name is holy - and is only invoked for the sake of sanctifying and confirming the testimony we give. We cite God as our witness and guarantor of truth. It leads us to an attitude of respect for the dignity of each other - because we are baptised in the name of God: to insult another is to load contempt on God's name whom the other bears.
3. ***Remember to keep the Lord's Day holy.*** This is the day of the covenant: to keep it holy means to remember we are incorporated into God's holy family and to celebrate the covenant by renewing its blessings among us. For the Old Covenant, this meant the seventh day of the week (when the first covenant was ratified, on the day God rested). In the New Covenant, the Lord's Day is the Day of the Resurrection - the eighth day (which is also the first day of the week - Sunday). It is about maintaining our awareness of our unique

relationship with God and taking responsibility for the flowering of the graces Christ has given us in our lives.

4. ***Honour your father and mother.*** This is about the respect that is due to marriage, our parents, and the family. It is about the extended family in terms of honour affection and gratitude. It is also about all those who exercise authority over us in the name of God – the government, magistrates, and teachers. It covers respect for all those with whom God shares his kingship in order to govern the lives of his children from the level of the nuclear family all the way through to the nation state.
5. ***You shall not kill.*** This is about the sanctity of human life - it calls us to turn the other cheek when provoked. It has always been understood to prohibit the killing of the innocent - but to acknowledge that in some cases, killing is unavoidable and does not infringe the commandment (such as accidental death, self-defence, justifiable capital punishment, the just war). It is about promoting the standard and quality of human life wherever possible and avoiding what will prejudice or destroy life. It includes respect for the bodies of the dead.
6. ***You shall not commit adultery.*** This is about the holiness of human sexuality and the call to uphold the sanctity of the sexual nature. Any action that demeans or destroys the sacred character of man's sexual nature and the invitation God extends to him through the sexual act to share in the miracle of creation is an attack on the dignity of man himself. So the commandment covers fornication, prostitution, homosexuality, contraception, divorce, etc.
7. ***You shall not steal.*** This is about respecting the belongings of our neighbour. It requires us to respect that ultimately God made the goods of the earth for the benefit of all humanity - but that this does not preclude the possibility of private property. It means that theft is contrary to love unless the withholding of consent is contrary to reason (such as in an emergency, where the need to feed the starving means using the excess property of others). This is about social justice - the responsible use of wealth by the powerful and the avoidance of exploiting the poverty of the weak.
8. ***You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.*** This is about being representatives of God who is “the Truth” - just as we have a right to hear the truth from God, so we are obliged to proclaim the truth to the ends of the earth. It is about proclaiming the fullness of the Good News. To withhold any part of it or to falsify the truth which sets us free is an attack on the dignity of our brothers and sisters. As we would find objectionable the idea that others could lie to us about something important (such as the faith and eternal life) so we respect that others may expect the truth from us.
9. ***You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.*** This is about purity of mind and heart. Coveting is to desire and hanker after what it is sinful for us to have. This is the commandment that corresponds to the sixth Beatitude (*Blessed are the pure in heart*). It is about preserving the holiness of mind and will. It looks at others as creatures of dignity and beauty, not to be used for my satisfaction.

10. *You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.* This completes the ninth Commandment and calls for purity in our use of material things as well as people. It corresponds to the first Beatitude (*Blessed are the poor in spirit*) and stresses the virtue of seeing this world in the perspective of the next - and thus prepared to renounce the good things of this world in order to achieve the better things of the next. This one is about avarice and greed, envy and pride, which cause in us the most terrible sins in order to acquire what we have coveted.

6. Conclusion

You might feel this is too complicated. Why should life be this difficult to understand? Surely God could have made it easier. Why do we have to obey this list of rules but according to the mentality of that list of blessings? Why not just tell us exactly what we had to do and just keep it simple, stupid? Wouldn't it be nice and easy if God had sorted it all out, laid it down for us in black and white and then simply told us to obey?

WELL - it would be easy in the sense that we wouldn't have to think any more, but I don't believe it would be *nice*. I think it would be far worse than having to think it out for ourselves with the help of God's grace and a willing heart. In effect, we would be asking God to treat us as children, to lay down laws without expecting us to understand why they are there, and to be content with us all obeying because we are told to. God forbid that he should ever treat us like that - we would resent and reject it as patronising and demeaning on the grounds that it denied our human freedom, intelligence, ability to think, choose etc. You see, God can't win. We hate to be treated as children because we know that we can do better - but we don't like behaving as adults because it's too much like hard work: it requires much thought, study, reading, discussion and then taking a decision that we are prepared to accept responsibility for.

But there is good reason for the reaction - why is it so hard for us to understand? If God made us, and designed us to image his nature, then all these moral principles should be natural to us, written in our own nature. This is true - we call it natural law: human nature has written within it the ability to recognise these moral truths. SO, for instance, even though we may not be able to explain very well why we think this way, nearly every human being would feel instinctively that actions like murder, theft, kidnap and rape were wrong. Unfortunately, this natural law within us is not immune from the effects of exposure to sin. The more we live in a society where sinful actions are tolerated or even regarded as good, the more difficult it will become for many people to retain their concept that the action is bad (look at how divorce was regarded 40 years ago and how it is accepted and even seen as good by so many people today). The upshot is that although we ought to know the difference between right and wrong, quite often we don't - we can confuse them or just not know how to act in a particular situation. We need guidance. That's often why we can *feel* like we are doing a loving thing but discover later that it was anything but loving. We are confused and blind.

God has responded in two major ways. The first is **REVELATION**: God revealed himself to Moses in the Law he gave on Mount Sinai. God continued to reveal to mankind, to those who wished to hear the truth, the nature of right and wrong. God

moulded and empowered through the centuries man's ability to perceive, to make moral judgements in accordance with the truths God had already revealed. God encouraged and nurtured man's moral perception by giving him a start in the form of the teaching he revealed in the Law. In addition to the Law of Moses, God revealed the truth through the Prophets - who regularly spoke up to denounce corruption, injustice, oppression of the poor and the weak, economic exploitation, forms of greed and abuse of power. Through these prophets, God continued to open man's eyes to the consequences of his actions and to how he should evaluate the moral character of the things he chose to do. This teaching and revelation reached a climax in the person of Christ. Christ fulfils the moral Law of God to perfection. Each of the Commandments he kept with absolute fidelity - and not just in eternal observance but also in the spirit of the Law in which it was given - self-sacrificing love of God and neighbour. Christ reveals the heart of the moral Law that is given particular expression in the 10 specific Commandments of the Old Testament - this heart is love. It is formalised and described in the particular laws revealed through Moses. Finally, Christ's revealing of the moral Law is not considered to end with Christ's Ascension into heaven. If that were true, it would mean we have no divine assistance to help us with new moral problems we face today (such as cloning, embryo experimentation, sex change operations, the moral character of the new business economies, international banking and Third World loans, A.I.D.S., the rubella vaccine issue etc.). We believe that Christ lives within his Church and teaches through the teaching office of the Church - the Bishops. Never forget the words of Christ to the apostles "Those who hear you hear me" (Lk. 10:16) - their teaching is the voice of Christ teaching today. For this reason, the Bishops of the Church in union with the Holy Father have a unique teaching role in the matter of moral issues. They are given to us by Christ who cares for his Church and family. Through them, Christ helps us to clarify the moral issues of our day: what we chose to do is still a decision we have to make, but we are not abandoned and left to try to figure it all out for ourselves.

The second way God responded to man's need for moral teaching and guidance, *CONSCIENCE*, we will be looking at in our next session.