

***May I speak in the name of the living God,  
Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Sometime ago, an ordained friend wrote an article for a Christian publication and began it by posing the question: ***“Aren’t Christians supposed to be set free from the Law? So why do we need Canon Law and Church Regulations?”***

Don’t worry, I am not going to give a lecture on the finer points of Canon Law, and the legal issues affecting the life of our church community.

In posing this question, my friend was reflecting on both the ministry of Christ and the writings of St Paul. On a number of occasions, Jesus vehemently attacked the Pharisees for their legalism, and the way in which by focusing on the minutia of the Law, they ignored the more significant issues of justice, mercy and faith.

St Paul in his Letter to the Roman's wrote:  
"No human being can be justified in the sight  
of God by keeping the Law; Law brings only  
the consciousness of sin."

In our Gospel reading today, we recall one of  
the occasions during the Last Supper, when  
Jesus said these or similar words: "If you  
love me, keep my commandments."

Clearly, he was not talking about the Ten  
Commandments. He was not talking about  
blind obedience to a rigid legal code.

I think what Christ was talking about was a  
set of guidelines for his followers – a new  
spirit, new values, new attitudes towards  
God and neighbour.

With this sense in mind, let's look at some of  
the does and don'ts that Jesus did point  
towards in his teaching throughout the  
Gospels.

Firstly, thinking about some of the don'ts.

Jesus was pretty clear in saying ***do not return evil for evil.*** We all know from our own experience, that nothing is achieved merely through retaliation. Darkness is piled on top of darkness. It is sometimes only by being prepared to break the cycle of violence, that light is shed on the way to reconciliation and peace. This is as much true in the field of international relationships – whether it is in the Middle East or parts of Africa; as indeed it is true in our relationships with each other, at home or at work.

Related to this, Jesus said ***do not judge or condemn your neighbour.*** We can never know all the facts in any particular situation. Our human perspective on things is always limited. Therefore, Jesus says that we must leave judgement to God alone.

Reflecting on the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air, Jesus said, ***do not worry about food and drink and clothes, as if these are the most important things in our lives.*** All of these things are obviously important –we cant live without them. I think Jesus is warning against the dangers of becoming so focused on the basics of life, that we don't leave room for the spiritual dimension. If we make our first concern our desire to live our lives in accordance with God's will, the rest will fall in to place. This has certainly been the experience of many Christians who have committed their lives to serve Christ in missionary work.

A few years ago, I was fortunate to hear an inspiring talk given by Damaris Hooper. Damaris is a young woman from Dorset, who works with the Community of St Stephen in Hong Kong, helping drug addicts to give up their addiction and enter back into ordinary life within the community.

The work of the community is funded entirely by charitable gifts from individuals in this country and support from some missionary agencies. It is never certain where the money is going to come from to pay the bills for food, clothing, accommodation and training. Damaris spoke with conviction of the way in which time and time again, through prayer, the money arrives – even if it is at the final deadline. And so the work of the community is able to continue.

Jesus said, ***do not look back once you have put your hand to the plough.*** By that, I think he meant, that once we have decided to follow him – we must keep our eyes firmly on him, his teaching, his example, if we are not to be deflected from walking the path he sets.

Following on from this, Jesus said, ***do not give up when the going gets tough.*** Jesus does not say anywhere that following him will be easy. However, he does promise to walk with us every inch of the way, and to strengthen and guide us through the power of the Holy Spirit that he gives to us.

Along side these don'ts, Jesus points us to ***a number of things that we should as his followers do.***

Jesus says, ***Do let the light of your goodness shine before people.*** Whether it is supporting a neighbour in need, helping to raise money for victims of a natural disaster, or raising awareness about issues of Fair Trade – we should let other people know and see what we are doing – not to gain thanks or praise for ourselves, but to help others to see the significance and importance of the teaching and example of Jesus we are trying to put into practice.

Jesus says, ***Do love your enemies.*** This is a hard one for most. All of us, I am sure know people who we find it difficult to get on with, or relate to. There are some people who it is very difficult to like – because of their attitudes, their treatment of us or others. However, Jesus says we must try to love, even those we find it difficult to love.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus encountered many who challenged, who obstructed and ultimately sought to destroy him. Although he on occasions expressed his anger, and made clear the difference in his outlook, he never stopped loving them, and always left open the possibility that they would welcome and receive of the love he offered.

Jesus says ***see that your hearts and minds are clean.***

Within the Jewish tradition there was a strong emphasis on ritual cleansing – the washing of pots and dishes on the outside, and the washing of hands and feet. Again and again in his teaching and ministry Jesus shows that it is what is in our hearts and minds that really matters. Superficial allegiance, or lip service is not sufficient. Our hearts and minds really need to be focused on Jesus and modelling our lives on his.



During the last Supper with his disciples,  
Jesus said Take this bread, and take this  
wine – ***do this in remembrance of me.***

Week by week, as we gather here to share  
in Holy Communion, we are obeying Jesus'  
command to break bread and share wine as  
a special way of remembering him, and his  
sacrificial love for us.

It is more than a simple act of remembrance,  
though – in receiving these tokens of Christ's  
love, we take Christ into our very being, and  
are strengthened and sustained by his love  
and peace.

Finally, the most important thing that Jesus asks his disciples to do ***is to love one another, as I have loved you.*** In a sense, this one command sums up all of the other does and don'ts – those that we have been thinking about this morning, and the others which we encounter in the Gospel accounts.

Christ in his life and ministry reflects the love of God his Father – his generous and forgiving love, which shines in its goodness, its readiness to forgive, its power to transform and renew.

He calls us in our lives to mirror this love, so that others may be touched by its warmth and power.

As we reflect upon Jesus words, If you love me, keep my commandments - it is not about following a rigid legal code, but about trying to reflect in our words, in our actions, in every aspect of our lives, the spirit of his love.

The apostles knew that Jesus loved them. We know that Jesus loves us. There is no mistaking love. You feel it in your heart. It is like a flame that warms the soul, energises our spirits and gives meaning and direction to our lives.

Jesus' words, spoken to his disciples at the last supper and spoken to us, each time we gather around the altar table, sum it all up - "Love one another as I have loved you."

Amen.