

The Law of Moses was very important for the people of Israel. They were rightly proud of the legal system they had developed in their desire to be God's people. Moses asks the Israelites in the First Reading: *"what other great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is whenever we call to Him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?"*

Through the Law with 613 prescriptions, they were expected to lead lives which were different, better than their pagan neighbors. There was, then, great emphasis on the observance of the Law as a sign of commitment and obedience to God. But, by the time of Jesus, the Law had become so hopelessly complicated in its applications. It was no longer a guideline helping people on their way to loving and serving God. It had become an end in itself. The emphasis was not on building a relationship with God and one's neighbor, but on checking out one's own external behavior.

In the Gospel Jesus tells us that many of the Old Testament laws were of human invention. They had little to do with loving God, but rather were more concerned with conforming to traditional customs. On the one hand, these human inventions helped those in authority keep control. On the other hand, people knew where they stood. If they externally observed the law they were "good," with no reference to how one's actions, or non-actions, caused the hurt. The commandment to love the Lord *"with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength,"* is to cleave to the Lord, communicating a loving commitment that engages the totality of the person, one's talents and capacity for action.

But the Jewish Law and the teaching of Jesus speak to us with one voice. What do they ask? They ask us to listen. *"Hear, O Israel,"* –pay attention, you don't want to miss this. What God is about to ask from you is important. Listen! Love God, Love neighbor. The Great Commandment of Jesus sums up the Old and New Testaments—to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This commandment is central to our faith, but it does not make it easy. It presupposes a healthy love and valuing of oneself. What makes this command so difficult is that it is ongoing, asking: what do I really want from another person?—understanding, tolerance, respect, loyalty, compassion—then to ensure that all my actions in regard to that person are positively enacted. When it comes to people we live with, people work with, go to school with, all those we see on a regular basis, it's not a question of loving them once. We are commanded to love them again and again, day after day.

So how do we love in this way? St Francis answers this question by observing a field of poppies. He asks, "When God made all the poppies in the world, did God make them all at once, or did God make them one-by-one?" Francis saw that God made them one-by-one. God made the first poppy and said, "Whooh, that's beautiful!" With childlike excitement said, "I think I'll make another one." God made the second poppy and said, "Whooh, this is as beautiful as the first! I think I'll make a third," until all the poppies in the world were created.

If we are to love in an ongoing way, let us appreciate the beauty of the person when we see them and the beauty of the act of loving. God is Love. What God creates is *“good, very good.”* Let us see the goodness of each person, see the goodness of all created things. If Jesus’ command is simply a burden or an obligation, it would be difficult to find the strength to love again and again, day by day. When we recognize God’s beauty in people, God’s beauty in creation, then God’s incarnate love is present and at work in us. Then Jesus can commend us for being *“not far from the Kingdom of God.”* Our love can see the beauty in the world and fill the world with poppies.

