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Deuteronomy 30 vv 9-14 p209, Colossians 1 vv 1-14 p1182, Luke 10 vv 25-37 p1042

Someone once said that complexity is the last refuge of the scoundrel. I'd like to be good, but I don't know how. I want to do the right thing, but it is so hard to know what the right thing to do is.

Moses confronts such excuses head on in today's reading from Deuteronomy. He says that things will go well if we act in accordance with God's Will for our lives. That in itself is obvious. God is the Creator of Heaven and earth. We can't know better than Him.

Moses then goes on to say that God's Will is not really so very hard to discern. His commandments are not hidden. You don't have to go up to Heaven to discover God's Will for your life. You don't have to cross the sea. Open your eyes. The glory of God is displayed in the world around you. The image of God is in the face of every human being you meet. You are a member of the community of faithful people, the Church. You have a conscience and a personal relationship with God. You've got the Bible and the Church's teaching. There isn't really any excuse for not knowing in broad terms what God's Will is for your life – that you should love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and that you should love your neighbour as yourself.

In today's very well known Gospel reading, the lawyer looks to me like he is trying to be clever and sophisticated. *What shall I do to inherit eternal life?* He says. Jesus pretty much says to him, *Don't you know? Don't you know already without asking me? You're a lawyer. What does the Law say?*

Well of course the lawyer knows what the law says. Every Jew knows that the Law commands him to love God and his neighbour. Every Christian knows that. Other religions and pagan philosophies have versions of the same golden rule: *whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets*. To love God and our neighbour is essential to our humanity. Sin, our failure to love, is a distortion of our real nature, a befouling of the image of God in which we are made, an enslavement from which we long to be delivered, and can only be delivered by Jesus Christ and His precious Death on the Cross.

The lawyer, however, digs himself a deeper pit. He wishes to justify himself. He foolishly asks, *And who is my neighbour?* And Jesus tells him. It's just so obvious. Suppose you had fallen among thieves, been beaten, robbed, stripped and left for dead. What would you that men should do unto you? Can anyone honestly say that it wouldn't be right to help someone like that for any reason at all? Maybe the priest and the Levite were in a hurry. Maybe they were afraid of ritual defilement from touching what looked like a corpse. Maybe they were afraid that the robbers were still around. There are plenty of excuses for not helping the man who fell among thieves, reasons even. But what does your conscience tell you? What does the Bible tell you?

The Samaritan perhaps had the best excuses of all. The robbers' victim was a Jew, a member of a race who despised Samaritans. The robbers' victim very likely believed that the Samaritan's religion was false. If the Jew and the Samaritan had met at the inn, the Jew might have refused to eat with the Samaritan. They certainly wouldn't have worshipped together. The Samaritan had plenty of excuses for not helping the Jew who fell among thieves. He even had reasons. But he did what he knew was right. He did what we all really know is right. And Jesus knew that the lawyer knew that, for all the prevarications and excuses which would spring to his mind, the right thing to do was to dress the wounds of the robbers' victim, to help him to the inn and to pay his board and lodging till he should have recovered.

I'm not saying that there are no ethical dilemmas. Is it right for a nation to have nuclear weapons? Could it ever be right to use them? Can we ever legitimately break our marriage vows? Is abortion ever the best solution to an unwanted pregnancy? What proportion of my wealth should I give to charities and missions? Is it ever right to tell a lie in order to avoid a worse evil? In dealing with criminals, what is the correct balance between justice and mercy? I'm not saying that there are no moral dilemmas. I am saying that the basic principles on which we have to decide are perfectly obvious or rather that the basic principle is obvious. The basic principle is love – self-sacrificial love – and we cannot use complexities and difficulties as excuses for not offering our lives in straightforward love for God and humanity.

We cannot always know what is the right thing to do in any particular case. There are plenty of differences of opinion within God's Church. What we can know, however, is that what is not of love is not of God.