

*The Playwright, George Bernard Shaw sent Sir Winston Churchill a caustic invitation, reading: - "Am reserving two tickets for you for my premiere. Come and bring a friend - if you have one." Churchill replied: "Impossible to be present for the first performance - Will attend second - if there is one." That's what you call getting your own back in a sort of polite way.*

In the book of Exodus the law allowed 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. But Jesus says we must love even our enemies which up to then, was unheard of. It was revolutionary then and it revolutionary now.

But our love of others has to be from the heart and go deeper than merely avoiding confrontation. The Northern Ireland conflict, for instance, resulted in the building of walls and barricades between people – structures which are still there. The problem may be contained but not truly resolved at a heart level. When Israel built that great high wall separating themselves from the Palestinians, the late Holy Father, 'saint John Paul 11', said that they should have been building bridges, not walls. Pope Francis also made reference to this.

But then, again maybe there is a bit of latent anger in all of us which could easily be triggered when our sense of security is threatened. This is where our love is tested. But on the other side of the coin we gain no credits either if our love for others is doled out in the exact same measure in which we hope to receive it.

Jesus says: 'If you love those who love you, then you're no better than non-believers in the gospel. The badge of true Christianity is when we look beyond our clan or class - beyond those people with whom we naturally feel comfortable, beyond our comfort zone and associate with those who are not part of our inner circle. This doesn't just apply to better-off people but also to people in general, rich or poor. By boxing ourselves in, whatever our social setting, our ability to love like Jesus is somewhat compromised.

Jesus associated with different social elements of his day. The disenfranchised might have included – the beggars, the lepers, the Samaritans, those with shady reputations. When they engaged with Him, he enabled them to break out of the mold in which society had cast them and realise God loves them the same as everyone else, if not more. But he also associated with the better off –

people like the rich young man and Nicodemus, and even Zacchaeus whom scripture calls a wealthy tax-collector. When they engaged with Jesus, it opened up a new chapter in their lives. Where do we stand in all of this?

Jesus 'broke the existing social mould' and in His efforts to be inclusive of everyone, was Himself rejected and nailed to a Cross. But in so doing, as the Scriptures tell us, "he would draw all peoples to Himself", with no one left out, except those who excluded themselves.

At Mass we come to Calvary where the Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts – a love which is not confined, but open to all.