

### 30A

*There is this story about a Jewish Rabbi who was in prison. It was a rigid regime and he barely had enough food to survive. He was a very orthodox Jew who stuck to the letter of the law in everything. Each day, when he got his meagre fare of food and drink, he went through all the ritual of washing before eating using up most of his daily allowance of water in the process. Luckily for him he got out of the prison in time. Another short while and he would have died of thirst - all of his own making.*

We know the Pharisees were sticklers for the letter of the law. Today they try to disconcert Jesus with an on-the-spot question. It seems that Jesus had a hard time convincing them that the law of love takes precedence over love of the law. The same could apply to all of us especially if we take a look at some of the Ten Commandments.

The Third commandment says that we must keep holy the Lord's Day. Attending mass is a big part of showing our love of God but do we participate in it as fully as we can by attentive listening to God's Word, putting our heart into the prayers, joining in the singing and taking advantage of periods of silence to pray and reflect.

Again, I love my neighbour and fulfil the sixth commandment by not being unfaithful to my spouse but the relationship may be just coasting along and not really going anywhere. Marriage is more than peaceful co-existence. There is a big difference in spiritual terms between a spouse and a partner. When a couple celebrates the Sacrament of marriage they are basing their love for one another on Christ's love for his church which involved the laying down of his life. In Christian marriage the husband and wife will lay down their lives for each other and their family.

I could keep the seventh commandment by never having stolen from anybody which fulfils the letter of the law, but there is more to it than that, like giving without counting the cost, be it in

time, money or possessions? Where in a scale of one to ten would I rank how generous I am? Remember the Lord's words: 'the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back'.

Focussing on the fifth commandment I can say for certain that I never ended anyone's life deliberately or physically attacked them but by withholding my friendship from people have I made their world a colder place where people may struggle to make sense of life or see it as God's gift to them.

Many people may feel so disaffected with their lives that they want to end it all. We know both here and in Ireland there is great concern about the high number of young people, particularly men, who do so. One of the priests ordained with me sadly did so. Loving our neighbour means getting the message across that no problem, howsoever large, is insurmountable. Life is precious.

*So, as far as loving God and my neighbour is concerned, the spirit of the ten commandments must take precedence over the letter. If I say 'I've loved enough', then I may not have really started.*