

*'At the time for the Divine Office as soon as the signal is heard all must drop whatever they have in hand and hurry along as quickly as they can, but with self control, so that there may be no provocation to misbehaviour. Nothing therefore is to be put before the Work of God '(RB 43)*

Except perhaps a work of charity when love prevails over the law. Straight away then we are into what we read as law, set in stone, and the art and need for interpretation. And so to today's texts especially such seemingly hard phrases as

*'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me.*

*Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me.'*

And so on. There's a phrase I think from the documents of Vatican II which speaks of a ' hierarchy of truths; some are more important than others and must take precedence and I think we're hearing something of this need for prioritisation today, this need that is to get our priorities in right order. A pressing need today for example is to put climate change at the top of our agendas because if we don't tackle that anything else we do- building new hospitals, managing migration, ending the war in Ukraine – will be wasted, for there won't be a world we can live in in fifty years time. These may all be good things to do but charity demands something greater, something more urgent. This demands vision and an understanding of Christ as the one who makes this vision possible – the one that is who makes love possible – that attention to the needs of another which is total, all consuming, a passion and a willingness to die in order that another may live. The British Library has recently recovered the tapes from Nelson Mandela's final trial for treason against the state in South Africa – he well knew that the penalty was death or at best life imprisonment but ends his wonderful defence of and for democracy with a very clear statement that he is prepared to die for this cause, that is for the sake of his people if need be. But the Judge gives him life instead. Jesus was not so fortunate but has given his life to us instead, and in that life a way of living for others, a life of love which prioritises our way of living, which will guide us to the most loving thing we need to do next – which may well be getting to the divine office on time or attending to the needs of mother, father and family or that holy man passing by the door as we heard in the first reading – an act of love which leads to life, to a son she will hold in her arms next year.

Perhaps we could just as well say

*'Anyone who prefers father or mother to love is not worthy of me'*

*'Anyone who prefers son or daughter to love is not worthy of me'.*

This in turn demands an informed conscience and much prayer – a conscience that is formed by love. .

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