Near the end of my time in the seminary, one of the formators encouraged us to build up a spiritual treasure chest, filled with gifts from God through Scripture and encounter experiences. The idea was that not only would we have treasure to draw from in our own personal spirituality but also ***treasure to share with others.*** I find myself drawing from this treasure often in prayer, in pastoral counselling, in homily preparation and any time I'm reading the Bible as connections are made between one text and another.

As I reflected on today's Gospel, I was drawn back to a powerful encounter with Jesus during a spiritual retreat at Ormiston about four years ago. I was walking in a garden at the retreat centre, praying about our parish, and I heard Jesus say something. When I hear Jesus speak, it's not usually an audible voice, but something I hear with the ears of my heart. And what I heard was very clear: *"Love them like they've never been loved before."* Now, I don't know about you, but I can be pretty deaf when it comes to listening to the voice of the Lord. Sometimes, I need to hear the same thing several times for it to really sink in. Later on, that morning, I was praying in another garden which celebrates the Wedding Feast at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine. Beside three stone water jars stands a magnificent sculpture of Mary. And as I prayed, I heard her speak. Do you know what she said? *"Do whatever He tells you!"* It was an incredibly joyful encounter, but also a deeply challenging one. ***This*** is how Jesus is calling me to love you.

Why am I sharing this? Because as well as being words that I need to hear over and over again – and live out – they're words which are meant for each one of us. As St Paul reminds us in the second reading, we are called to set an example for others to follow. That responsibility belongs

to me as parish priest but also to all the baptised. It means letting go of our preferences and our attachment to what was, and learning to love with self-sacrificial love.

How many times have you heard today's Gospel - the greatest commandment of the Law? Familiar as these words may be, if we truly allow them to challenge us, they cut to the core. Let me ask you something: who is the person you're struggling to get along with right now? Who are you avoiding, or refusing to speak to? That's where the commandment to love becomes very real - because as St John says in his first letter, *"Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen"* (1 Jn 4:20).

There's a key line at the end of Gospel that's easy to miss. *"On these two commandments,"* Jesus says, *"hang the **whole** law, and the prophets also"* (Mt 22:40). Put another way, Jesus is saying that everything we do as a Church hangs on these two commandments: the celebration of Mass, our reception of the Eucharist, our financial generosity and all our service. The Law and the Prophets encompassed everything the Pharisees held sacred and the same is true for us: everything we do as a Church loses its meaning if it's not grounded in love, as St Paul says to the Corinthians, *"Without love, I am a gong booming or a symbol clashing. Without love, I am nothing"* (1 Cor 13: 1, 2b).

And so, as God challenges me to *love you like you've never been loved before*, I challenge you: no matter how long you've been practising your faith, do not forget to practise love. By being here, I can safely presume that your identity is that of a practising Catholic, but it's so easy to turn up, receive the Eucharist and go home without practising the one thing

that gives meaning to everything else. Mass is not a task to get done each week; it is a place to encounter Jesus, receive His love in the proclaimed Word and in Eucharist, and to be formed to love others as He loves us. For, as Jesus Himself says, *"By **this** everyone will know that you are my disciples, **if** you have love for one another"* (Jn 13:35). The greatest treasure we can share is the love that Jesus makes visible in the way we love one another. Amen.